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Neither National Nor a Curriculum?

ROBIN ALEXANDER

ABSTRACT This article examines the government's view, as revealed in its June 2012 National Curriculum proposals, of the purposes and character of the primary curriculum as a whole. The proposals are found to be deficient in a number of respects: in their naive, selective and inflated use of international evidence; in their treatment of aims as no more than cosmetic; in their impoverished take on culture, knowledge and values; in their reduction of educational standards to test performance in the 3Rs; in their perpetuation of the damaging Victorian legacy of a two-tier curriculum; and in their characterisation of spoken language, despite what has long been known about its vital role in development, learning and teaching, as little more than 'idle chatter'. In sum, the proposals are judged to betray contempt for other than politically-compliant evidence and to fall seriously short of what a national curriculum minimally entails.

Introduction

On 11 June 2012, Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove published draft programmes of study (PoS) for English, mathematics and science in the primary phase of England's national curriculum, whose review and revision he had initiated in January 2011 with the appointment of an 'expert panel'. (The quotation marks remind us that some commentators uncharitably judged the honorific to have overstated the panel members' attributes).

Gove's 2012 proposals were accompanied by a letter to the expert panel chair.[1] Others have responded in detail to the draft programmes of study and the particular view of primary school English, mathematics and science that they seek to enforce. This article concentrates on the Secretary of State's letter because it is the closest the government comes to providing an account of the character of the national curriculum *as a whole*. Such an account ought to be a requirement of any national curriculum review worthy of the name – three subject syllabuses hardly constitute a curriculum – so what the Secretary of State says on the matter merits attention.

This article was originally prepared as a formal response to the Secretary of State's proposals on behalf of the Cambridge Primary Review, which the

author has directed since 2006 and which in 2010 published its own critique of the current national curriculum together with detailed proposals for reform.[2]

The Use of International Evidence

The injunction to emulate the policies and successes of 'high performing jurisdictions' appears several times in the Secretary of State's letter and the quoted phrase has become something of a policy mantra, rather affectedly peppering the discourse of the entire national curriculum review, especially where the Secretary of State and the chair of his Expert Panel are concerned. However, despite the confidence and frequency of its claims about what 'high performing jurisdictions' are up to, the government seems unaware of (or uninterested in) the spectrum of relevant evidence from international comparison outside what the US National Research Council calls Type 1 and Type 2 studies [3] or of the tendency of policymakers everywhere to over-interpret the PISA and TIMSS international student achievement data, or of the hazards of naive, mono-factorial and otherwise unsustainable attributions of cause and effect in accounting for other countries' success.[4]

The Department for Education (DfE) has certainly been made aware of reservations from many quarters about its use of international data. For example, I submitted a paper on such matters in November 2011 [5] and have regularly copied officials into other relevant material.[6] I have also put the DfE in touch with authoritative sources in other countries whose expert knowledge of those countries may well exceed that on which ministers have chosen to rely.

It is not just that international evidence has been cited selectively and tendentiously in support of the line taken by the current national curriculum review, essential though such evidence undoubtedly is. It is also clear from the Secretary of State's letter that the limited range of international evidence of which ministers have been made aware has been allowed to supplant or become a proxy for the analysis of those *national* circumstances and needs – cultural, social, demographic and economic – that are no less important a determinant of a country's national curriculum.

There are several points at which the Secretary of State's letter illustrates this distortion, perhaps most strikingly when it says that we must 'ensure that our children master the essential core knowledge which *other nations* pass on to their pupils' (his words, my italics). Clearly, in an interdependent and competitive world it is useful to know what other nations define as 'essential core knowledge' in the school curriculum, but it is surely taking matters too far to ordain that because a sample of their 15-year-olds outperforms a sample of our 15-year-olds in the PISA tests those nations' accounts of 'essential core knowledge' should replace our own.

Gove's edict is so blinkered in its take on what a national curriculum is about, and anthropologically so contemptuous (or perhaps merely naive) in its detaching of knowledge from the culture that creates it and invests it with meanings and significances that may be particular rather than universal, that it

should be repeated lest in scanning his letter we overlook it. We must, he says, 'ensure that our children master the essential core knowledge which other nations pass on to their pupils'.

Gove has, of course, failed to grasp both the value and pitfalls of international comparison. We study education elsewhere to learn from it, not to copy it. Even granted the fact of globalisation and the imperative of economic competitiveness, there is much more to shaping a national curriculum than mimicking the curricula of PISA high performers; and it has yet to be shown that such mimicry raises standards. In any case, as I've shown elsewhere, double standards all too often apply. Thus, British governments voice admiration for high-performing Finland but then, finding Finnish education policies politically unpalatable, copy the United States, whose schooling system performs relatively modestly in PISA and by some accounts verges on the dysfunctional. Meanwhile, the true lessons from Finland go unheeded.[7]

Aims

In both its final report and its evidence to the government's national curriculum review, the Cambridge Primary Review (CPR) devoted much attention to the aims of our national education system, and the imperatives and values that might shape it over the next few decades.[8] This work was informed by widespread stakeholder consultation across the country as well as by commissioned searches of published national and international evidence. CPR also deplored the typically British tendency to determine aims after the event, so that they decorate school prospectuses and entrance halls rather than shape the curriculum in action.

The Expert Panel referred to this work but did not use it, and proposed instead five aims of its own with no obvious evidential provenance. These in turn were ignored by government, which fell squarely into the trap against which we warned. Having determined the precise structure of the curriculum and much of its content, the Secretary of State invited us to enter into discussion about the aims which his non-negotiable curriculum specification can be claimed, *post hoc*, to pursue, thus guaranteeing that yet again the aims will be no more than cosmetic.

Further, though the intended consultation on aims seems somewhat pointless for the reason I have given, the Secretary of State says in his letter that in this matter he will privilege the views of teachers. This is wrong. In a pluralist democracy the aims and values underpinning the state's maintained education system and its curriculum concern every elector, taxpayer and citizen, not just those who happen to be teachers. Where teachers' views should have supremacy is in deciding how within schools and classrooms the agreed national aims should be implemented.

Sadly, therefore, the concerns that CPR summarised in its 2010 policy priorities statement have not been heeded:

> *Address the perennially neglected question of what primary education is for.* The Mrs Beeton approach – first catch your curriculum, then liberally garnish with aims – is not the way to proceed. Aims must be grounded in a clear framework of values – for education is at heart a moral matter – and in properly argued positions on childhood, society, the wider world and the nature and advancement of knowledge and understanding. And aims should *shape* curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the wider life of the school, not be added as mere decoration.[9]

As noted earlier, learning from 'high performing jurisdictions' is desirable but is no substitute for those 'properly argued positions on childhood, society, the wider world and the nature and advancement of knowledge and understanding' that a well-founded national curriculum requires. In this matter, the government has yet again sought comfort from Mrs Beeton.

Standards and Accountability: the core and the rest

Like the government, CPR stands firmly for high educational standards and the public accountability of schools and their teachers. However, it differs from government and the Secretary of State in the matter of how standards should be defined and how accountability should be exercised. In his letter the Secretary of State defines standards as how well pupils perform in English, mathematics and science, and accountability as how such performance is publicly demonstrated, though he also urges high expectations for other subjects even though they will not be tested nationally. The latter sentiment is welcome, but we should remind ourselves of the familiar and well-documented risk that many schools will concentrate on what is tested to the detriment if not the exclusion of the rest. Further, for the subjects outside the core – that is, those subjects whose content is to be determined by each school individually – it is hard to know how accountability can be meaningfully demonstrated in other than a highly localised and non-transferable sense.

Again, I do not wish to repeat what CPR has reported elsewhere on these matters [10], but I must stress our central arguments: national 'standards' should be about all aspects of the curriculum, not just limited aspects of three subjects; schools should therefore be accountable for the quality of the whole curriculum, not just part of it; and accountability should be demonstrated by a variety of indicators, measures and procedures, not just through national tests. Or as CPR expressed the matter in its list of policy priorities presented to the incoming government in 2010:

> *Abandon the dogma that there is no alternative to SATs.* Stop treating testing and assessment as synonymous. Stop making Year 6 tests bear the triple burden of assessing pupils, evaluating schools and monitoring national performance. Abandon the naive belief that testing of itself drives up standards. It doesn't: good teaching does.

> Initiate wholesale assessment reform drawing on the wealth of alternative models now available, so that we can at last have systems of formative and summative assessment – in which tests certainly have a place – which do their jobs validly, reliably and without causing collateral damage. Adopt CPR's definition of standards as excellence in all domains of the curriculum to which children are statutorily entitled, not just the 3Rs. And understand that those who argue for reform are every bit as committed to rigorous assessment and accountability as those who pin everything on the current tests. The issue is not *whether* children should be assessed or schools should be accountable – they should – but *how* and in relation to *what*.[11]

It is a source of considerable disappointment to us that the government's Bew review of testing did little more than scratch the surface of these issues [12], and that ministers continue to treat tests, assessment and accountability as synonymous. It is also clear that for accountability and quality to be guaranteed beyond the three core subjects, there need to be agreed national frameworks of some kind for those subjects whose content schools are invited to determine for themselves.

Levels and Assessment

The Secretary of State says in his letter that he has 'decided that the current system of levels and level descriptors should be removed and not replaced' on the grounds that it is 'confusing for parents and restrictive for teachers.' This appears to be a decision already taken rather than a proposal offered for discussion, so there may be little point in commenting on it. However:

- CPR's evidence suggests that the system of levels, which has been in place since 1988, may well be in some respects restrictive but it is at least familiar to all teachers, and indeed to parents, and many teachers say that they find it helpful rather than otherwise.
- The Secretary of State's letter is not at all clear about what should replace the current levels. He talks of 'some form of grading of pupil attainment in mathematics, science and English'. At the DfE/CPR consultation on the proposals on 29 June 2012, officials referred to assessment at the end of years 2, 4 and 6 to 'show if children have met standards' and to secure the government's aim of 'high stakes accountability' (the phrase used by the officials), but in response to further questions said that there will be no testing in Year 4. There seems to be some confusion, then, over both the alternative to levels and the nature and extent of national assessment. We trust that clear proposals on these matters will form part of the formal consultation now scheduled to start in January 2013.
- If it is the intention to up the assessment stakes by increasing the amount and frequency of testing, then this suggests that government has failed to heed

the extensive negative evidence on this issue, including that contained in CPR's interim and final reports.[13]

Spoken English

The Secretary of State, and the draft programmes of study, announce that 'the importance of spoken language should be a priority throughout the new national curriculum'. What is actually proposed in the draft programmes of study contradicts this. Indeed, there is deep concern in many quarters about what is seen as a severe weakening of the profile of spoken language in the draft programmes of study, and this despite the considerable array of evidence with which ministers and DfE have been presented.

That evidence makes talk that is cognitively challenging and rigorously orchestrated absolutely essential to children's thinking, learning and understanding both within each subject and across the curriculum as a whole. It is also a vital tool for effective communication and a lifeline for those children who are disadvantaged socially and linguistically. And we now have a critical mass of international evidence demonstrating that high quality talk raises tested standards in the core subjects.[14]

Of all this, as of alternative evidence on international comparisons, ministers and DfE officials are fully aware. Indeed, on 20 February 2012, at my request, the Department organised a seminar on spoken language in the national curriculum attended by lead NC review officials, national and (by videolink) international experts, and the Schools Minister. The event was preceded by extensive correspondence and meetings with both ministers and officials, including the Secretary of State himself.[15]

I and several others who participated in the DfE seminar are particularly concerned about (i) the statements that head each of the three draft programmes of study, which are so brief and bland as to be pointless, (ii) the failure to follow them through within each PoS to the extent required, (iii) the removal of spoken language as a distinctive strand within the English PoS.

Although the partial attempt to implement the seminar's recommendation of 'talk across the curriculum' is a small step forward, it is not convincingly pursued in the mathematics and science drafts, or even in the reading and writing components of the English draft, where the relationship between spoken and written language is of critical importance. As to the removal of the spoken language strand from English, this is an error which in my judgement cannot be allowed to stand. It appears to be informed by the wholly mistaken belief that in the teaching of English there is no more to spoken language development than what can be subsumed in reading and writing. In fact, children's acquisition of the knowledge, understanding and skill that enable them to use spoken language with the fluency and flexibility necessary for learning, employment and life requires attention to talk in its own terms *as well as* in the contexts of reading and writing. This is emphatically not an either/or issue, for such a focus draws on knowledge about the dynamics, registers and

grammars of spoken language, and of language in use in a wide variety of real life contexts, a pursuit which is distinct from the teaching of reading and writing. This is something employers and university admissions tutors readily understand when they complain about school leavers' restricted powers of oral communication and their limited ability to shift from informal and colloquial talk to the more precise and formal registers required for presenting and defending a case, explaining ideas, probing others' reasoning or participating in discussion.

Far from prioritising talk as claimed in the Secretary of State's letter of 11 June, the decision to remove it as a distinct strand of the English PoS represents a backward step – one, indeed, which may well frustrate two of the government's key intentions: to raise educational standards and to close the gap between disadvantaged children and the rest. Incidentally, the Expert Panel's suggestion that spoken language can be enhanced by highlighting it in curriculum aims is a non-starter and should be disregarded. It is what is required by the programmes of study that makes the difference. Spoken language *must* remain as an explicit strand of the English programme of study.

We have to say that we are also somewhat baffled by this turn of events, for at the DfE seminar on 20 February, the Minister signalled his acceptance of the arguments summarised above. However, he also expressed the fear that raising the profile of spoken language could 'encourage idle chatter in class'. We say again here, as we said then, that those of us working in this field have long advanced something which is neither idle not mere chatter: an approach to spoken language that is rigorously planned and implemented; that engages and sustains children's attention to the task in hand; that challenges and stretches their thinking; that probes their understanding and misunderstanding, building on the one and rectifying the other; that demands as much of the teacher's expertise as it does of the child's developing linguistic skills. In any case, one child's idle chatter may be another's exploratory talk, especially where early years teaching and learning are concerned. Conversely, one minister's grave warning to the nation may be another's idle chatter.

It would be a cause for deep concern to us, as it would surely be to every parent and teacher, if the perception I have quoted were to triumph over a body of international evidence which is as conclusive as it is vast, and if as a consequence children were to be denied access to the full cognitive, social and pedagogical potential of classroom talk properly managed.

I urge ministers to reverse their ill-advised decision on spoken English. I also remind them of the evidence summarised in the position paper prepared for DfE's February 2012 seminar on Oracy, the National Curriculum and Educational Standards.[16] Not to act on that evidence would be irresponsible. It is true that the evidence also shows that in too many classrooms the quality of talk is not what it should be, but that is precisely why the government needs to give a clear lead; and it is why raising the profile of spoken English in the curriculum needs to be accompanied by action in initial teacher training (ITT) and continuing professional development (CPD). On this front ministers should

be encouraged by the considerable strides that some schools and ITT/CPD providers have made, even though the national picture remains very uneven.

Breadth, Balance and the Character of the Curriculum as a Whole

Perpetuating the Divided Curriculum?

We are pleased to see that the Secretary of State endorses the principle of curriculum breadth for which CPR has so strenuously argued. However, what is proposed is breadth in a somewhat qualified form.

Schools will be required to teach, alongside the three core subjects, 'art and design, design and technology, geography, history, ICT music and physical education across all the primary years.' However, that formula guarantees breadth on paper only, for the programmes of study in these subjects will be very brief, and what is taught will be largely determined by schools.

There is nothing wrong with that approach. Indeed, it is close to what CPR commended in its own curriculum framework.[17] But whereas CPR's framework allowed local discretion and variation for *every* subject within agreed national parameters, the Secretary of State offers such freedom only for those subjects he deems relatively unimportant. In contrast, for English, mathematics and science he proposes to specify in exhaustive detail 'the content that each child should be expected to master ... every year.' Since this contrast is reinforced by assessment requirements, with English, mathematics and science subject to national tests and 'some form of grading of pupil attainment', we can be reasonably sure on the basis of past experience that in a significant proportion of schools teachers will teach to the test and have scant regard for the rest.

As CPR argued in its final report and its evidence to the national curriculum review, the only meaningful sense of a broad curriculum is where breadth is allied to quality, and where all children encounter a curriculum in which every subject is taught to the highest possible standard regardless of how much or how little time is allocated to it. Here, history is once again a sobering guide to where the government's proposed approach could lead:

> During the 1970s and 1980s inspection evidence showed that ... literacy and numeracy were always taught, but the fate of the rest of the curriculum depended on the inclinations and expertise of each school's teaching staff. In our best primary schools this autonomy yielded a curriculum of vision, vitality and rigour. At worst it meant that during their seven critical years of primary education many children encountered little or no history, music or drama (for example), and when they did so those encounters were fleeting and undemanding. In these schools, teachers' freedom to choose what subjects to teach, and with what degree of conviction, effectively denied their pupils the later freedom of choice for which a balanced

> and well-taught foundational curriculum, grounded in much more than functional literacy, is the minimum prerequisite. Especially hard hit, as always, were those children whose families lacked the resources to make good the deficit out of school.
> This is the warning from recent educational history that the government's national curriculum review must not ignore. Freedom for teachers – a necessary corrective to 13 years of government micro-management – cannot be pursued at the expense of young children's need for a proper foundation for later learning and choice.[18]

What former HM Chief Inspector and DfE Permanent Secretary David Bell called the 'two tier curriculum' (the 'basics' and the rest), and what CPR's evidence showed was a hierarchy of *teaching quality* as well as allocated time, was in the view of CPR one of the problems of English primary education most urgently in need of attention.[19] Not only has it not been attended to in these proposals: it has been reinforced.

Looking Forward or Harking Back?

There are three further difficulties with the proposed approach to shaping the whole curriculum. First, just as the *lessons* of history in respect of the two-tier curriculum have been ignored (indeed the lessons of Britain's educational history overall appear to have been overtaken by the obsession with the contemporary activities of 'high-performing jurisdictions'), so the *habits* of history have been allowed to persist unchallenged. The start and end point of this review has been the same hierarchy of subjects that frames the current national curriculum. Neither the government nor the Expert Panel appears to have asked whether this hierarchy, which goes back to the 1988 Education Reform Act (and indeed to a century before that) remains appropriate for the next generation of children. The omission is curious as well as serious, given how much we have heard about modernisation, globalisation, the changing international situation and the need to plan for the future, and it seems decidedly odd to look forward by harking back. This retrospective tendency is underlined by the fact that the one subject in the current national curriculum which the Secretary of State does *not* prescribe is one of its most recent and welcome arrivals: citizenship.

Second, the anomalies of the current national curriculum – notably, perhaps, the handling of faith – are allowed to persist, presumably on the grounds that attending to such anomalies would require legislation, and legislation is what the whole curriculum package seeks to avoid. I should add – and CPR's curriculum proposals underline this – that what we object to here is not religious education but the persistence of the 1944 Butler Act's separation of the 'religious' and the 'secular' curriculum, a separation that makes it difficult to approach the treatment of faith in contemporary education and society in a

manner that is properly in tune with the cultural, religious and moral condition of Britain 70 years after Butler.

Third, the entire framework is informed by a view of 'essential knowledge' which is hinted at but not explicated or justified, though enough has been said about the influence on these proposals (including by ministers themselves) of the ideas of E.D. Hirsch for the rationale to be pretty clear, and that rationale is undoubtedly illustrated in the three proposed programmes of study. However, just as we challenged the idea that the future of spoken language in young children's education can depend on one minister's anxieties about 'idle chatter in class', so we would wish to challenge the assumption that it is for ministers in a culturally diverse and very plural democracy to determine exactly what knowledge is 'essential' and what knowledge is not.

Neither National Nor a Curriculum?

This takes us to our final concerns about what the Secretary of State has proposed. We have to ask whether what we have here represents a national curriculum that is worthy of the name. We believe that there are four senses in which it does not.

First, the proposed 'national' curriculum is for some children in the nation's maintained schools but not all of them. Academies and free schools may opt out. If there is to be a national curriculum at all, then it should be both an entitlement for all children in maintained schools and an obligation on all those who teach in those schools.

Second, there is little evidence in the Expert Panel report, and even less in the Secretary of State's proposals, of the kind of close and careful weighing of national culture, national needs and England's unique and hugely complex mix of commonality and diversity that should precede and inform any attempt to devise a national curriculum that has a reasonable chance of speaking to the condition of more than a minority of the nation's children and families. The Cambridge Primary Review undertook this task, working both from published evidence and an extensive programme of discussions with stakeholders – including children, parents, teachers, community representatives, business leaders, faith leaders, local and national politicians from all parties, and many others in different parts of the country. In this programme CPR also made a point of meeting and hearing from children and families who in our society tend to be marginalised, disadvantaged and vulnerable.[20] It is regrettable that DfE, and indeed the Expert Panel, have ignored this extensive and vital work.

Third, although the responsibility for initiating a review of the national curriculum certainly rests with government, government has an equal responsibility to ensure that what emerges is able to cross political divides and unite the majority of the electorate around a view of the curriculum for state-maintained schools to which most can subscribe. Indeed on pragmatic grounds alone this makes sense, for a policy which teachers support is more likely to be successful in practice than one with which they unwillingly comply, and the

evidence from the period 1997-2010 is very clear on this. Equally, the national curriculum is surely one area of public policy where a government has an obligation to try to achieve political consensus and where the debate ought to rise above party politics. Instead, this venture has been pursued in an aggressively party-political manner and both evidence and expertise have been viewed through an unashamedly ideological lens. Alternative views and evidence on curriculum scope and balance, or on the nature and structure of knowledge, have been dismissed out of hand as leftist or 'progressive', which for those of us who believe in an inclusive, rational, principled and evidentially-grounded approach to curriculum thinking is as inaccurate as it is insulting.

Fourth, what we have here are proposals not for a curriculum but for just three subjects. The attempts by the Expert Panel, the Cambridge Primary Review and others to conceive of the curriculum as a whole, addressing questions of scope and balance in relation to individual, cultural and economic need, have been rejected in favour of the assumption that if the inherited 'core' subjects are prescribed in detail the rest can sort itself out. Past evidence shows that in relation to what happens in many schools this assumption is optimistic.

So in four decisive senses what is proposed is neither national nor a curriculum:

- it is for some of the nation's children in state maintained schools but not all of them;
- it offers no account of the national culture and circumstances to which a national curriculum ought to relate, being influenced more by dubious extrapolations from what other countries do;
- it makes no attempt to reach a consensus on values and rationale, presuming instead that it is entirely proper in a democracy for a national curriculum to serve as a vehicle for imposing upon the majority the values, beliefs and prejudices of an ideological minority;
- it represents not so much a curriculum as a syllabus for three subjects.

Implementation Issues

Genuine curriculum reform cannot be achieved merely by redefining what is required, for the curriculum as enacted in schools and classrooms is a much more powerful determinant of educational quality and progress than the curriculum as prescribed on paper.

DfE has been advised that if it aligns with the prescribed curriculum various 'control factors' like testing, inspection, teacher training and approved textbooks it will have a better chance of ensuring that teachers teach what is required and of reducing the gap between prescription and enactment.[21] However, I have warned elsewhere that far from being a novel insight as has been claimed, this is precisely what was attempted with Labour's national literacy, numeracy and primary strategies between 1998 and 2010.[22] Not only did this approach work only up to a point; it also caused considerable collateral curriculum damage, alienated much of the teaching profession and

replaced the autonomous judgement which is essential to intelligent and effective teaching by dependence and unthinking compliance. This is yet another historical lesson that has been ignored.

The precedent is doubly important, for the new national curriculum requirements will be implemented in a context where established forms of professional support – notably from QCDA and local authorities – are no longer available.

This situation makes it all the more urgent that government addresses the problem of curriculum capacity about which it was warned in the CPR's final report and in numerous subsequent exchanges. CPR argued that children are entitled to a curriculum which is taught to the highest possible standard in all its aspects, yet HMI and Ofsted have consistently revealed considerable variation in the quality of subject teaching across the primary sector, especially in relation to the non-core subjects, and it is clear that this relates to schools' access to appropriate levels of subject and pedagogical content knowledge.

In 2011, the Secretary of State accepted CPR's recommendation on this matter [23] and initiated an enquiry into the capacity of primary schools to plan and teach a broad curriculum to a consistently high standard. The enquiry was undertaken internally, and the report was not made publicly available. However, CPR remained closely involved and the DfE report supported CPR's and Ofsted's published conclusions: curriculum capacity, in many primary schools, is indeed a serious problem; and it is a problem because the curriculum has expanded in scope and complexity beyond what the inherited pattern of generalist class teaching can sustain.

The solution is not as simple as replacing generalists by specialists, though nurturing and more effectively deploying specialist expertise is certainly an essential element. I have proposed a range of strategic options for tackling the problem, ranging from the diversification of models of initial teacher training (as opposed to routes into teaching, which are already diverse) to more flexible ways of deploying staff both within and between schools.[24] As yet, the options have not been properly discussed. The matter cannot be postponed much longer.

We stress, however, that in the coming discussion curriculum capacity must not be equated solely with subject knowledge, essential though subject and subject-specific pedagogical content knowledge certainly are. As I argued in a recent paper for DfE:

> The term 'curriculum capacity' refers to the human and other resources that a school is able to command in two areas:
> o relating to the aims, scope, structure, balance and content of the curriculum as a whole;
> o relating to the detailed planning and teaching of individual curriculum subjects, domains or aspects.

A school is regarded as having appropriate curriculum capacity if:

o it is able to conceive and plan a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum in pursuit of relevant and properly argued educational aims;
o each subject, domain or aspect of that curriculum is planned and taught to a consistently high standard, regardless of how much or little time is allocated to it.[25]

Capacity in the first sense is even more important in the context of a national curriculum review that offers schools no meaningful perspective on the curriculum as a whole.

Notes

[1] http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/nationalcurriculum/b0075667/national-curriculum-review-update

[2] Alexander, R.J. (Ed.) (2010) *Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, pp. 174-278. London: Routledge.

[3] National Research Council (2003) *Understanding Others, Educating Ourselves: getting more from international comparative studies in education*, ed. C. Chabbott & E.J. Eliott. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. 'Type 1' studies include PISA, TIMSS and other international student achievement surveys, 'Type 2' includes desk-based cause-effect policy extrapolations from those data, exemplified by the McKinsey and Oates reports; 'Type 3' encompasses the much larger body of empirical comparative educational research, of which governments mostly tend to be unaware despite their often significant policy applications.

[4] Alexander, R.J. (2012) Moral Panic, Miracle Cures and National Policy: what can we really learn from international comparison?, *Scottish Educational Review*, 44(1), 4-21.

[5] Alexander, R.J. (2011) Could Do Even Better?: making the most of international comparison as a tool of policy. Paper for DfE, November.

[6] For example, Alexander, R.J. (2012) Entitlement, Freedom, Minimalism and Essential Knowledge: can the curriculum circle be squared? Paper presented at the CPPS Westminster seminar, 23 April. http://www.robinalexander.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/CPPS-text-Alexander-120423.pdf; Alexander, R.J. (2012) Citing Finland's Educational Reforms in Support of those Proposed for England: a warning. Paper for DfE, May.

[7] Alexander, R.J. (2012) International Evidence, National Policy and Classroom Practice: questions of judgement, vision and trust. Keynote address at the Third Van Leer International Conference on Education, Jerusalem, 24 May. http://www.robinalexander.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Van-Leer-2012-Alexander.pdf; Ravitch, D. (2010) *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*. London: Basic Books; Alexander, R.J. (2012) Citing Finland's

Educational Reforms in Support of those Proposed for England: a warning. Paper for DfE, May; Sahlberg, P. (2010) *Finnish Lessons: what can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* New York: Teachers College Press.

[8] Alexander, R.J. (Ed.) (2010) *Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, pp. 174-202. London: Routledge.

[9] Cambridge Primary Review (2010) *After the Election: policy priorities for primary education*, University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, p 3. http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/downloads/revised_2011-02/POLICY_PRIORITIES_BRIEFING_REVISED_2_11.pdf

[10] Alexander, R.J. (Ed.) (2010), *Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, especially pp. 239-245, 319-326, 471-474 and 496-500. London: Routledge.

[11] Cambridge Primary Review (2010) *After the Election: policy priorities for primary education*, University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, p 3. http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/downloads/revised_2011-02/POLICY_PRIORITIES_BRIEFING_REVISED_2_11.pdf

[12] DfE (2011) Independent Review of Key Stage 2 Testing, Assessment and Accountability: final report (Bew Report). London: DfE.

[13] Alexander, R.J. (Ed.) (2010) *Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, chapters 16, 17 and 23. London: Routledge; Alexander, R.J., Doddington, C., Gray, J., Hargreaves, L. & Kershner, R. (Eds) (2010) *The Cambridge Primary Review Research Surveys*, chapters 17 (Tymms & Merrell), 18 (Whetton, Ruddock & Twist), 19 (Harlen), 16 (Balarin & Lauder) and 29 (Wyse, McCreery & Torrance). London: Routledge.

[14] As reviewed at the AERA international conference, *Socialising Intelligence through Academic Talk and Dialogue,* held at the University of Pittsburgh in September 2011: Resnick, L.B., Asterhan, C., Clarke, C. & Hofkens, T. (Eds) (2013, forthcoming) *Socializing Intelligence* [papers from the AERA Pittsburgh conference], AERA.

[15] The correspondence and meetings with ministers, DfE officials, Ofsted and the government's reviews are listed at the beginning of the paper referred to at note 16.

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[18] Alexander, R.J. (2011) Primary Schools Need a Broad Curriculum, *The Guardian*, 15 March.

[19] Alexander, R.J. (Ed.) (2010) *Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, chapters 13 and 14, London:

Routledge. HMCI David Bell's warning ('We cannot afford, and our children do not deserve, a two-tier curriculum') is in Ofsted (2005) *Standards and Quality 2002-3: the annual report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools*. London: Ofsted.

[20] Alexander, R.J. & Hargreaves, L. (2007) *Community Soundings: the Cambridge Primary Review regional witness sessions*. University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/Downloads/Int_Reps/1.Com_Sdg/Primary_Review_Community_Soundings_report.pdf

[21] Oates, T. (2010) *Could Do Better?: using international comparisons to refine the national curriculum in England*, Cambridge Assessment; DfE (2011) *The Framework for the National Curriculum: a report by the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum Review*, DfE.

[22] Alexander, R.J. (2012) Entitlement, Freedom, Minimalism and Essential Knowledge: can the curriculum circle be squared? Paper presented at the CPPS Westminster seminar, 23 April. http://www.robinalexander.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/CPPS-text-Alexander-120423.pdf

[23] '[We recommend] a full national primary staffing review of the relationship between (i) the curricular and other tasks of primary schools as they are now conceived, (ii) the roles and numbers of teachers and other professionals required, (iii) the expertise and training/retraining which this analysis dictates ... The potential to tackle the problem through clustering, federation, resource-sharing, teacher exchange and all-through schools should also be examined.' (Alexander, R.J. (Ed.) (2010) *Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, recommendation 127, p. 506. London: Routledge).

[24] Alexander, R.J. (2012) Strengthening Curriculum Capacity in Primary Schools: definitions, levels, roles and options. Paper for DfE, January; Alexander, R.J. (2012, forthcoming) Curriculum Freedom, Capacity and Leadership in the Primary School. Paper for the National College NPQH curriculum leadership module.

[25] See note 24.

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ROBIN ALEXANDER is Fellow of Wolfson College at the University of Cambridge, Professor of Education Emeritus at the University of Warwick, and Director of the Cambridge Primary Review, an independent enquiry into the condition and future of English primary education that in 2009 published *Children, their World, their Education* and *The Cambridge Primary Review Research Surveys* and since then has been disseminating its findings, engaging with

policymakers and building an extensive professional network. Among his other books are *Versions of Primary Education* (1995), *Policy and Practice in Primary Education* (1997), *Learning from Comparing* Vols 1 and 2 (1999 and 2000), *Culture and Pedagogy* (2001), *Towards Dialogic Teaching* (2008) and *Essays on Pedagogy* (2008). *Correspondence*: rja40@cam.ac.uk