

## Seminar 1: Process Approach to Curriculum & Learning

### Slide 1 - Introduction

Following the consideration of CfW by the CCG on 9<sup>th</sup> March in Newport, this seminar input is intended to support people to deepen their thinking about process approaches to curriculum and learning and what this might mean for people when they think about, and work with, Curriculum for Wales. From the evidence that we analysed following that event, what became clear was that people were keen to consider what a process orientation might mean for the role of the teacher, for the role of subject knowledge, and for the role of the learner, and we have therefore structured this seminar to account for these three different areas of consideration.

### Slide 2 - The Process Approach

To begin with, the roots of process approaches to curriculum and learning can be traced back through the work of different thinkers and bodies of work. Process approaches themselves are concerned with the development of the pupil and the processes of learning, and they are typically shaped by overarching aims and principles. These ideas of development of the learner are very closely linked with the ideas of individual growth and the important role that education can play in that process.

If we look back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, we find that the educational philosopher John Dewey spoke quite prominently as education as a process of individual growth that centred on the developing experiences of the individual. If we jump forward a few decades, then we see these ideas of individual growth reflected in two key projects that play quite an important part in the story of process approaches.

The first of these we find in the work of Jerome Bruner in the 1960's, and the second of these, we find in the work of Lawrence Stenhouse. Bruner's curriculum project involved the development of a course of work for elementary school entitled: 'Man: A course of study' in which an enquiry stance was taken to learning centred on the act of question-posing. To guide teaching and the educational experiences of the pupils involved, in this particular project, overarching principles took the form of pedagogical principles.

In the 1970s, Lawrence Stenhouse developed the Humanities Curriculum Project which also adopted an enquiry approach, and which purposefully crossed subject boundaries. It focussed on a single aim associated with the Humanities, and similar to the project that Bruner undertook, developed a specification for pedagogy and material selection, rather than specifying a set of behavioural objectives. The work that Stenhouse undertook in this project – in no small part - led to the publication of a book by Stenhouse in 1975 entitled: 'An introduction to Curriculum: Research & Development' in which he was the first to articulate that which people now typically understand to be a process approach to curriculum and learning.

James McKernan, whose work we will also refer to in this input, was inspired by Stenhouse and notes that the process approach, sometimes referred to as the 'learner development

model', where curriculum is seen as a continuous educational experience rather than a product, or series of outcomes.

### Slide 3 – The Process Approach

As we have suggested, a process approach to curriculum and learning is a different way of thinking than we would find if, for example, we used a product curriculum. In a sense, it is seen as proposal for a process of education rather than a specification of outcomes or results of teaching and learning. James McKernan, in reflecting on his own understandings of what a process curriculum is, argues that it is: *“a proposal setting out an educational plan, offering students socially valued knowledge, attitudes, values, skills and abilities, which are made available to students through a variety of educational experiences, at all levels of the education system.”*

While knowledge, values and skills are part of learning just as they would be for other models of curriculum, the focus on learning involves thinking differently which, in turn, allows different questions to be asked about curriculum and learning. As argued by Mark Priestley: *“...the key question should not be ‘what subjects should we teach?’; instead, we should be asking ‘what knowledge is of most worth?’ and ‘how might we best teach that (e.g. through subject-based or inter-disciplinary approaches)?”*

### Slide 4 – What does this mean for creating a curriculum?

So, what does this process orientation actually mean for creating curriculum?

Process oriented curricula can take different forms, but the reality is, there is no blueprint for creating curriculum. There is no single correct step-by-step procedure to apply, and how people develop curriculum using this orientation can be seen as quite creative process in which they will engage with different parts of the curriculum and contextualise learning within their own schools and settings.

Rather than organising learning in terms of outcomes, intentions, or national standards, it uses broader developmental aims and purposes. The content is then chosen, and the learning experiences developed in a way that help pupils develop towards these aims or purposes. In the case of Curriculum for Wales, these broad purposes have been established as part of the curriculum design.

The creation of curriculum from a process orientation relies quite heavily upon teachers' knowledge of subjects, of pedagogies and of the learners themselves. All of these, and the connection with the educational values and purposes considered important in the curriculum, help them make choices about what is taught and how this might best be learned. The chosen content will draw from subjects as well as other things that are seen as important for learners and content is selected when it is judged as worthwhile for pupils to engage with. In thinking through how this selected content will be taught – the pedagogical processes, if you will - Mary James argues that the aim here is to help learners develop an understanding that it broadened, deepened, enhanced, and enriched. When taking a process approach, learning and teaching do not aim at a particular goal but rather unfold to

support growth and development towards the broad aims and purposes set out in the curriculum.

Speaking from a process perspective, James McKernan has a really nice quote that captures just a little bit of the nature of this type of curriculum development. He says: "A curriculum is something of taste and judgement, testing the power of creativity, research and evaluation, calling upon our best powers of imagination."

### Slide 5 – What does this mean for knowledge?

So, what does a process orientation mean for the place of knowledge?

Well, as is almost always the case with education, language plays a really important role. The fact that there is such an overt focus upon the processes of learning with this particular orientation might suggest that knowledge is somehow displaced, or that the process approach is without content.

Well in fact, knowledge and content play a really important role in process curricula, just as they do with other forms of curricula. While different curricula might frame and position knowledge differently, every curricula nonetheless, must make decisions as to which knowledge is worthwhile, and for Lawrence Stenhouse, knowledge really mattered.

Now, the process approach doesn't ignore what is to be learned, but rather, it frames and positions what is to be learned in a slightly different way. Content, which is considered worthwhile must still be selected, but there is a strong emphasis placed on 'how' and 'why' it is to be learned, and this is why the processes of learning become so important.

Adopting a process approach to curriculum and learning means that knowledge is not seen as content to be mastered as would be found with a content approach. Nor does content take the form of intentions or outcomes to be met, as would be the case with an objectives or product model of curriculum. Instead, learners are supported to develop holistically through learning experiences in which they engage critically with different knowledges and content. In this way, these worthwhile and valuable knowledges and content are situated within learning experiences that are designed by the teacher to enable pupils to develop meaningful understandings of what is being learned and explored.

A final thing that is important to recognise here, is that the different skills, knowledges and understandings taught through any curriculum can be organised in various ways: they may be organised by subject, which could also include cross curricular approaches; there may be a number of interdisciplinary or broad field curriculum areas; there could be different curricular themes around which things are organised and not separate, but permeable and able to be brought together to explore and enquire in to different themes in a more integrated way; it could be around the interests of a child where knowledge is seen as developed by learners with teacher facilitation to explore and learn in a more integrated curricular and child centred way.

Now, regardless of the organisation of the curriculum, the important things to remember when creating process orientated curricula are the questions posed by Mark Priestley that we referred to earlier- what knowledge is of most worth, and how might we best it?

#### Slide 6 – What does this mean for the teacher's role?

So, from a sense of how we might think about knowledge in a process orientation, we now ask what this might mean for the role of the teacher. Now, from what we have explored so far through the work of those such as Stenhouse and McKernan, we are probably beginning to get a sense of what the role of the teacher might be in a process approach to curriculum and learning. We know, for example, that they are selectors of worthwhile content, and we know that the teachers' subject knowledge, knowledge of pedagogies, and knowledge of the learners themselves are really important to what ultimately appears as quite a creative process of curriculum development. In fact, as recognised by McKernan, in a process approach, teachers become creators of curriculum, rather than deliverers of curriculum content. In fact, he describes teachers as constructive agents whose role rests upon professional judgement and reflection. In unpacking the teacher's role a little further, McKernan identifies three different dimensions to this – a creative dimension, an evaluative dimension, and a responsive dimension. In a process orientated curriculum, part of the teacher's role is to enquire into the different ways in which learners engage with learning experiences, and to review and evolve both the curriculum and the pedagogic approaches based upon what they understand.

In the context of education, as an ongoing process of individual growth and development, the teacher's role is one where they create the curriculum, they share that curriculum through the practice of teaching, they evaluate it through classroom practice and professional reflection, and evolve it in response to this.

#### Slide 7 – What does this mean for the teacher's role?

As creators of curriculum and learning, the role of the teacher in the process approach is, in many ways, an empowering one, but one that is nonetheless contingent on their subject knowledge, the knowledge they have of their pupils, the knowledge they have of pedagogies, and the connection that they have to the educational values and purposes that are considered important in the curriculum that they work in.

Despite the fact that Knight is writing from the perspective of higher education, the observations offered here are helpful in terms of how we view the role of the teacher. He argues that the process approach involves teachers thinking about what educational purpose are desired before "imagining how to draw together the processes and engagements" likely to result in these purposes being achieved by the pupils. What Knight is drawing attention to here is the importance of how teachers think through pedagogy, how they reason about pedagogy, and he also recognises that pedagogical approaches will have to be adaptive – that they will vary according to the age of the learner, where they are in

their learning, and the complexity of the types of knowledge and content it is that the pupils are learning.

Pedagogy, in a process approach, is about the teacher creating meaningful engagements with worthwhile knowledge, through which pupils can develop towards the overall aims and purposes.

With the final bullet point, we highlight a question posed by Mary James, that challenges us to think about pedagogy in the longer term. She asks: which pedagogic processes will encourage learners to develop understanding that is “enriched” across their school careers?