



**Maynooth  
University**

National University  
of Ireland Maynooth

# Primary Curriculum in Ireland:

The past

The present

The possibilities

INTO Education Conference

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# Structure of the Presentation

The Past

The  
Present

The  
Possibilities

# What is a Curriculum?

- *The term 'curriculum' encompasses the **content, structure and processes** of teaching and learning, which the school provides in accordance with its educational objectives and values. It includes specific and implicit elements. The specific elements are those **concepts, skills, areas of knowledge and attitudes** which children learn at school as part of their personal and social development. The implicit elements are those factors that make up the **ethos and general environment** of the school. The curriculum in schools is concerned, not only with the subjects taught, but also with how and why they are taught and with the outcomes of this activity for the learner.*

Department of Education (1995:18)





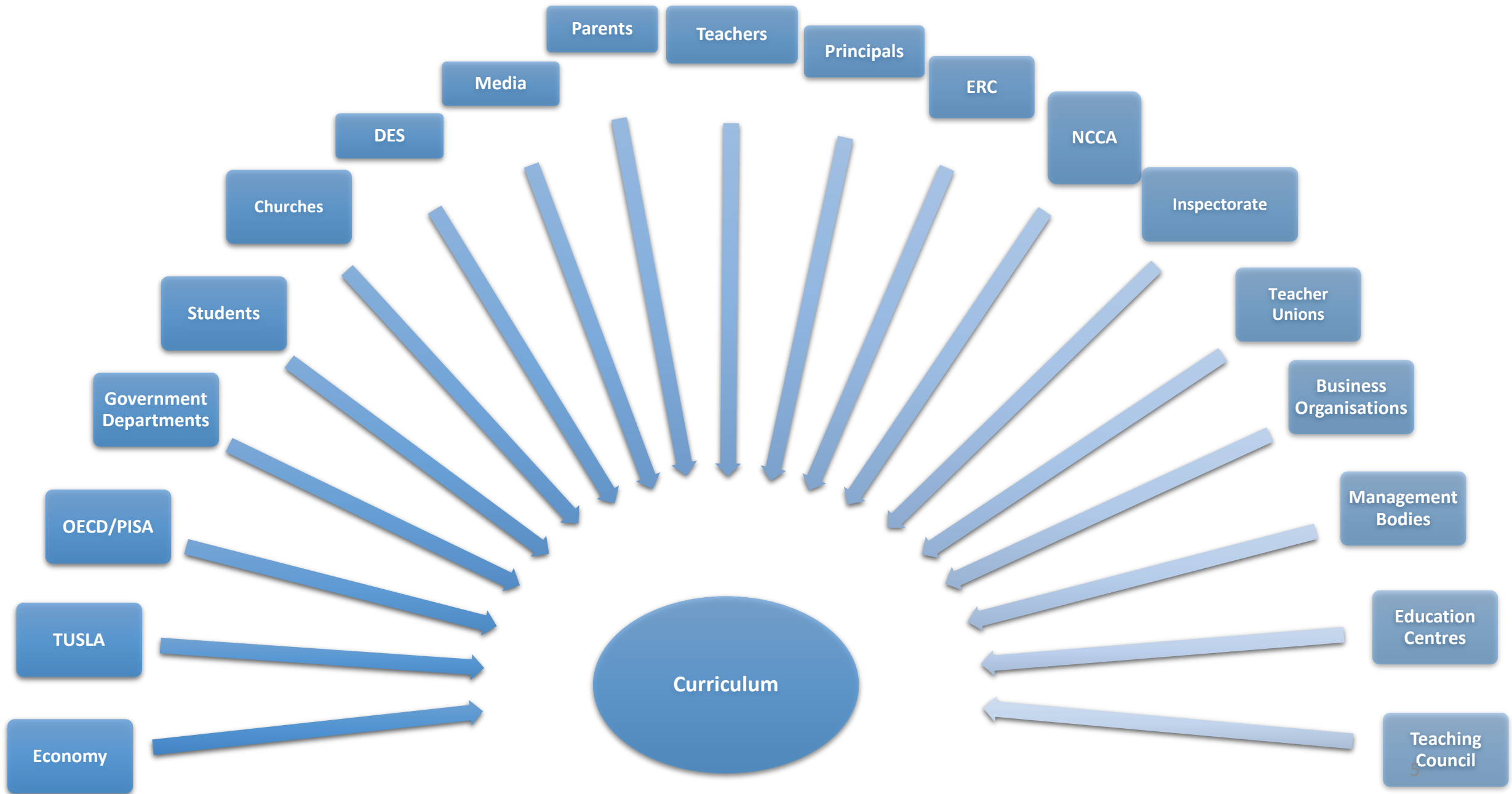
Curriculum as the story one generation tells to the next

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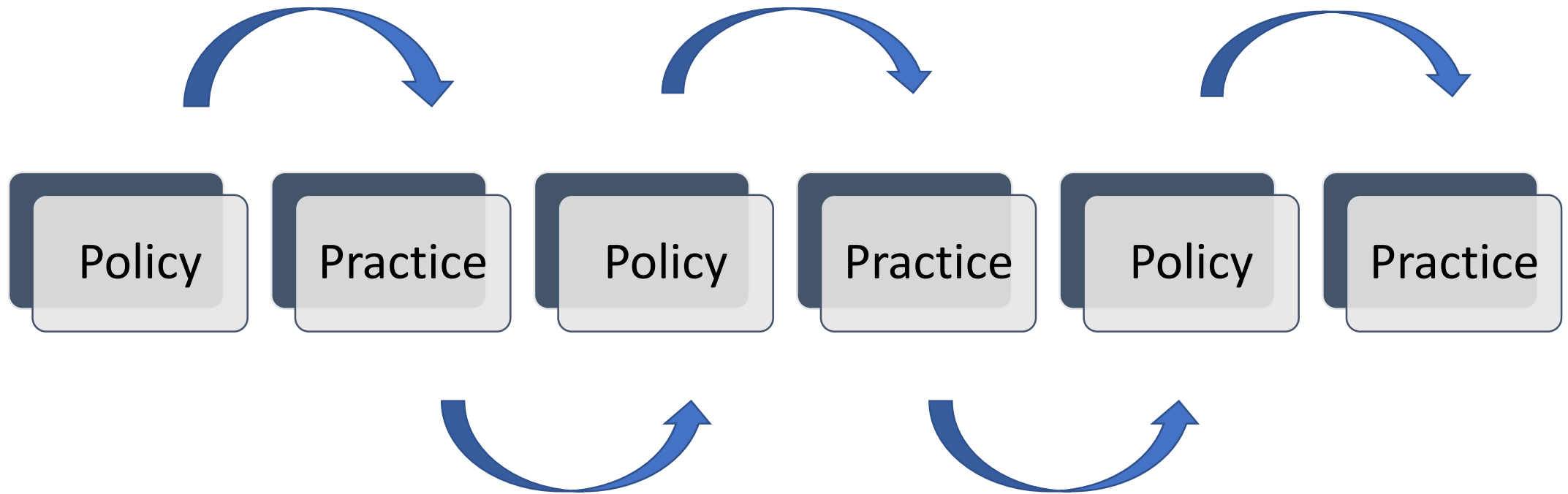
(Dr. Anne Looney)



# Influences on Curriculum



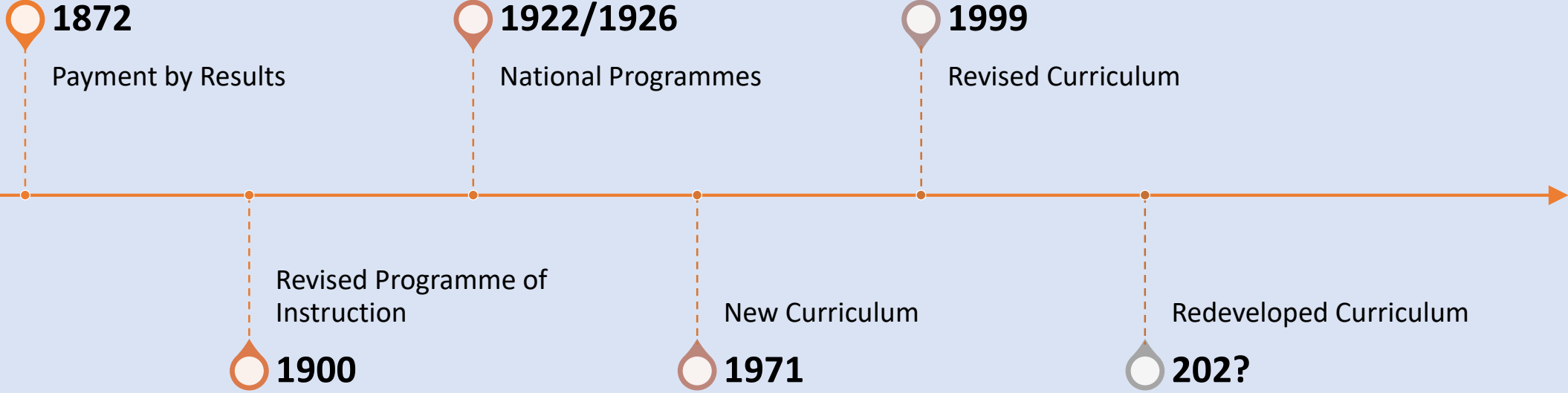
# Policy and Practice





# Curriculum: The Past

# Primary School Curriculum in Ireland



Social

Political

Economic

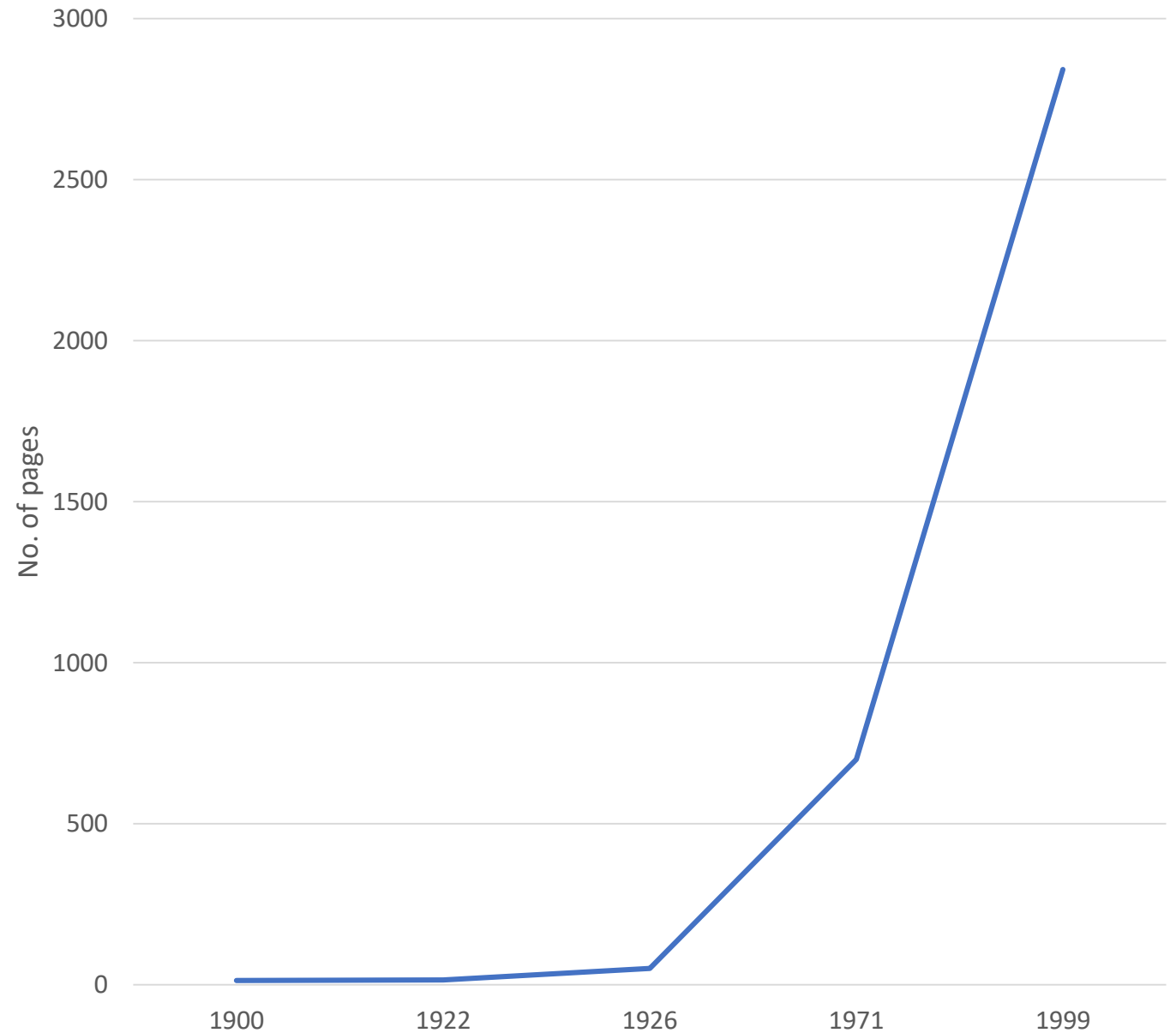
Cultural

Religious

Educational



# No. of Pages in National Curricula (1900-1999)



## Curricula must change: Payment by Results (1872)

- *“That to secure a better return for the outlay and labour of the National system, each Teacher, besides a fixed class-salary, should receive an addition according to the number of children whom the Inspector, after individual examination, can pass as having made satisfactory progress during that year.”*

## Curricula must change: Cookery and Laundry work (1900)

- *“...they do not wish to train cooks or laundresses, but to impart such information about these domestic sciences as shall enable the average primary school girl, when she assumes the position of housewife, to perform the ordinary culinary and washing operations that may appertain to her position, or efficiently to superintend these operations when performed by others.”*

The Programme as specified for each subject is not obligatory but is merely an indication of the aims and desires of the Commissioners. The Commissioners will consider other Programmes which Managers may bring under their notice. But such Programmes must be arranged in the first instance in conference with the Inspectors of the district.” (CNEI, 1901:29)

“Teachers are at liberty to draw up and submit for the approval of the Education Authority special programmes to suit the circumstances of their individual schools taking into account the number and attainments of the staff, the local needs, etc., but all such programmes must be framed along the lines of the National Programme.” National Programme Conference (1922:4-5)

Freedom for teachers within curricula



# Curriculum: The Present

# 1999 Curriculum: Successes



Continuity



Partnership and  
consultation



Broad and  
holistic



Child-centred



Phased  
implementation



Centrality of  
teachers







# 1999 Curriculum: Challenges

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‘Physical face’

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Add-on initiatives

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Clarity

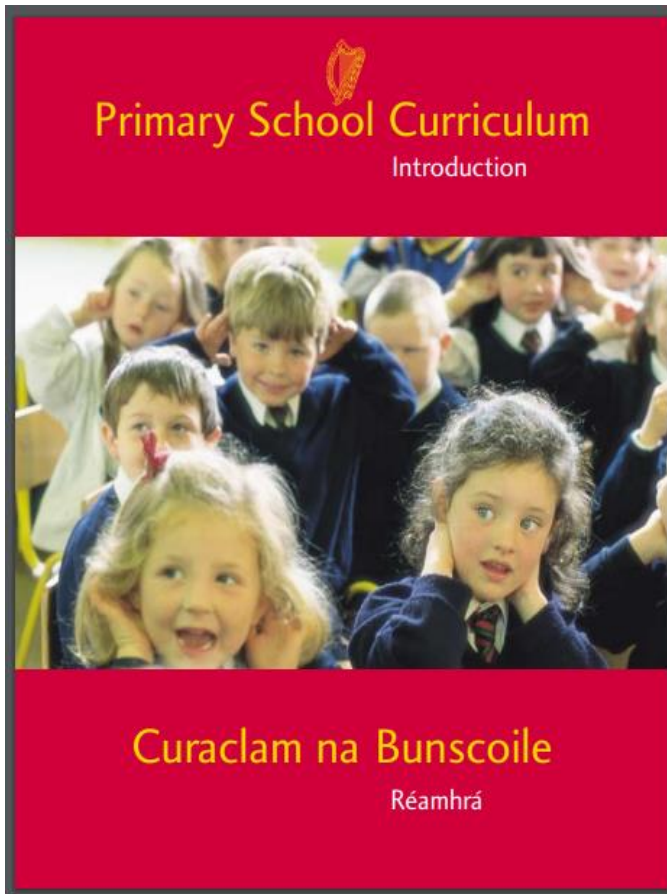
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Coherence

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Pedagogical guidance

# Elements in the Curriculum Introduction (including subject aims and objectives)



**purpose** 15 key issues 11 specific aims  
25 general objectives 3 aims  
215 subject broad objs  
2 principles 15 learning principles  
8 defining features  
**Goal** 97 subject aims **Vision**



The image features a dark grey background with three overlapping blue circles. A white horizontal band is positioned across the middle of the circles. The text "Curriculum: The Possibilities" is centered within this white band.

# Curriculum: The Possibilities

# Teacher Agency

“[T]his concept of agency highlights that actors always act **by means of their environment** rather than simply in their environment [so that] the achievement of agency will always result from the **interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors** as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations.”

(Biesta and Tedder, 2007:137)



## Reinventing the Curriculum

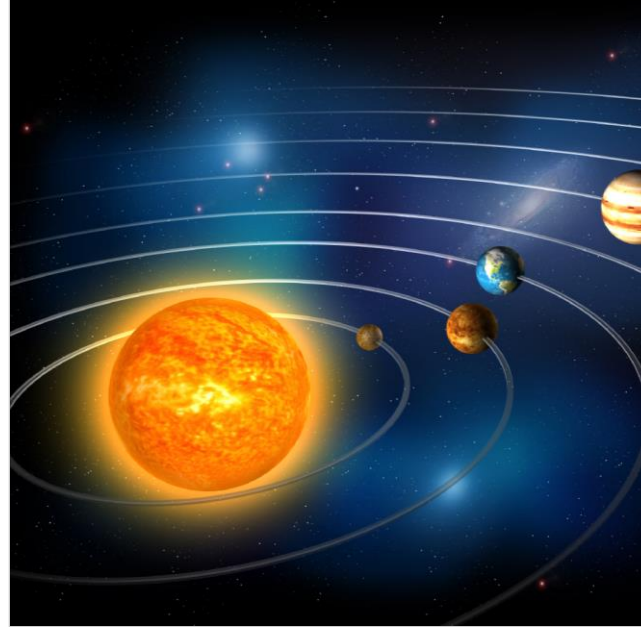
New Trends in Curriculum  
Policy and Practice

Edited by  
Mark Priestley and Gert Biesta

BLOOMSBURY



And it is not  
only about  
teachers....



“Public policy in respect of teacher development tends to focus on raising the capacity of teachers as individual actors; our view is that it needs to attend more explicitly to the **cultural and structural domains which frame teachers’ work.**”

(Priestley et al., 2015:np)



# Professional Capital

## Human Capital

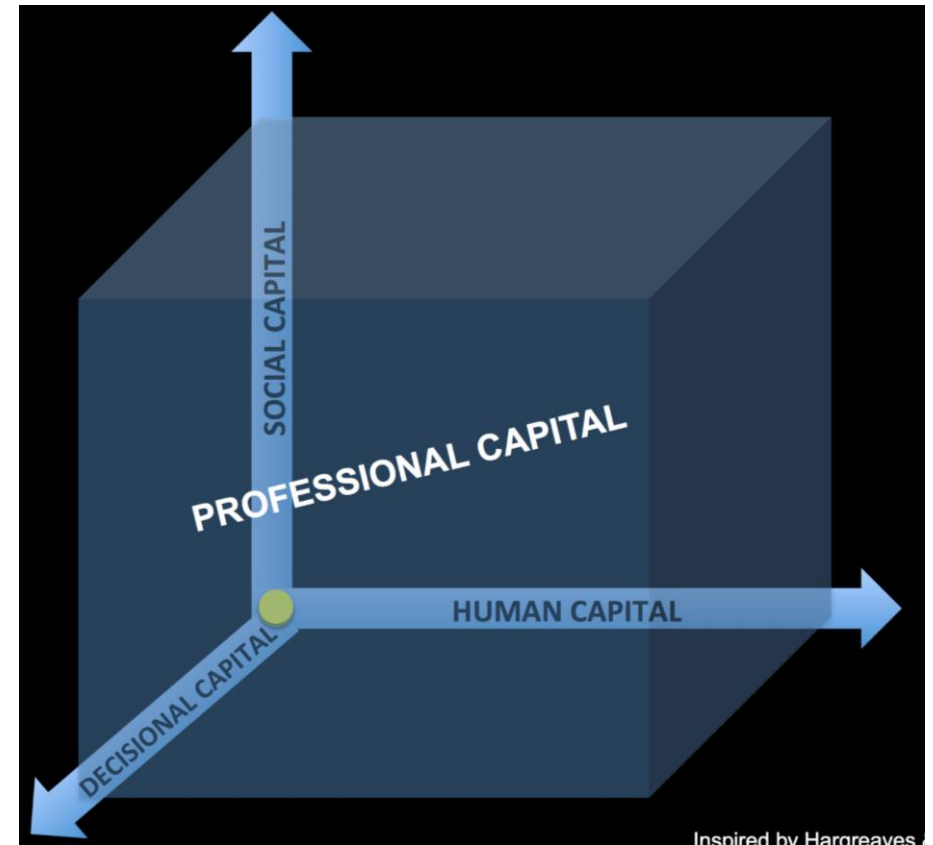
Individual  
"talent" or skills

## Social Capital

Collective skills  
and interactions

## Decisional Capital

Making decisions  
in complex  
situations



(Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012)



Change is Challenging!

Teacher as  
master  
baker...



(Alexander and Flutter, 2009)



# Conclusion: Hopes for the future of the curriculum

Alignment and  
coherence

Theoretical,  
conceptual and  
research base

Teacher agency

Pedagogical  
guidance

Reform of  
educational  
ecosystem

Substantive  
and systematic  
supports

Rolling review



# Míle Buíochas

- “...teaching is not a matter of following recipes but ultimately requires teachers who are able to make wise situated judgements about what is educationally desirable.”  
(Biesta, 2013:140)



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