Primary Curriculum in Ireland:
The past
The present
The possibilities

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Structure of the Presentation

- The Past
- The Present
- The Possibilities
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

(Dr. Anne Looney)
Influences on Curriculum

- Parents
- Teachers
- Principals
- Economy
- OECD/PISA
- TUSLA
- Government Departments
- Churches
- Students
- Media
- DES
- ERC
- NCCA
- Inspectorate
- Teacher Unions
- Business Organisations
- Management Bodies
- Education Centres
- Teaching Council
Policy and Practice

Policy
Practice
Policy
Practice
Policy
Practice
Curriculum: The Past
Primary School Curriculum in Ireland

- **1872**: Payment by Results
- **1900**: Revised Programme of Instruction
- **1922/1926**: National Programmes
- **1971**: New Curriculum
- **1999**: Revised Curriculum
- **202?**: Redeveloped Curriculum

Subject areas:
- Social
- Economic
- Cultural
- Religious
- Educational
- Political
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.”

Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education (Ireland) (1870:522)
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.”

Commissioners of National Education (1901:27)
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)
Curriculum: The Present
1999 Curriculum: Successes

- Continuity
- Partnership and consultation
- Broad and holistic
- Child-centred
- Phased implementation
- Centrality of teachers
1999 Curriculum: Challenges

- ‘Physical face’
- Add-on initiatives
- Clarity
- Coherence
- Pedagogical guidance
Elements in the Curriculum Introduction (including subject aims and objectives)

- Purpose
  - 15 key issues
  - 25 general objectives
  - 215 subject broad obj
  - 2 principles
  - 15 learning principles
  - 8 defining features

- Goal
  - 97 subject aims

- Vision
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)
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)
(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
“...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)
References


References


• National Programme Conference (1922). *National Programme of Primary Instruction*. Dublin: The Educational Company of Ireland.


