

Key Competenc(i)es - Oriented Curriculum: planning and embodiment in schools

Professor Mark Priestley
University of Stirling, UK





Today

- Curriculum ideologies
- Competency-based curriculum – international directions of travel
- Curriculum making – a systemic view
- UK policies: Scotland and Wales
- Developing your curriculum

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide featuring a row of colored pencils in various colors (brown, red, orange, yellow, green) standing upright. The background behind the pencils is a light blue gradient.

Curriculum ideologies

Curriculum is political and contested. Four broad ideologies or orientations:

1. **Academic rationalism** – traditional/liberal forms of knowledge/content-led education
2. **Social efficiency** – preparation of future citizens and learners – technical-rational
3. **Humanism (child-centrism)** – focused on human development, child centred
4. **Social reconstructionism** - challenging inequality, social justice, redistribution.

(e.g., Schiro, 2012)

- Different purposes, different practices, etc.
- These can co-exist – e.g., a primary focus on social efficiency, and secondary foci on humanism and social reconstruction in Scotland
- Different phases can have different orientations – e.g. primary education on humanism, secondary education on academic rationalism

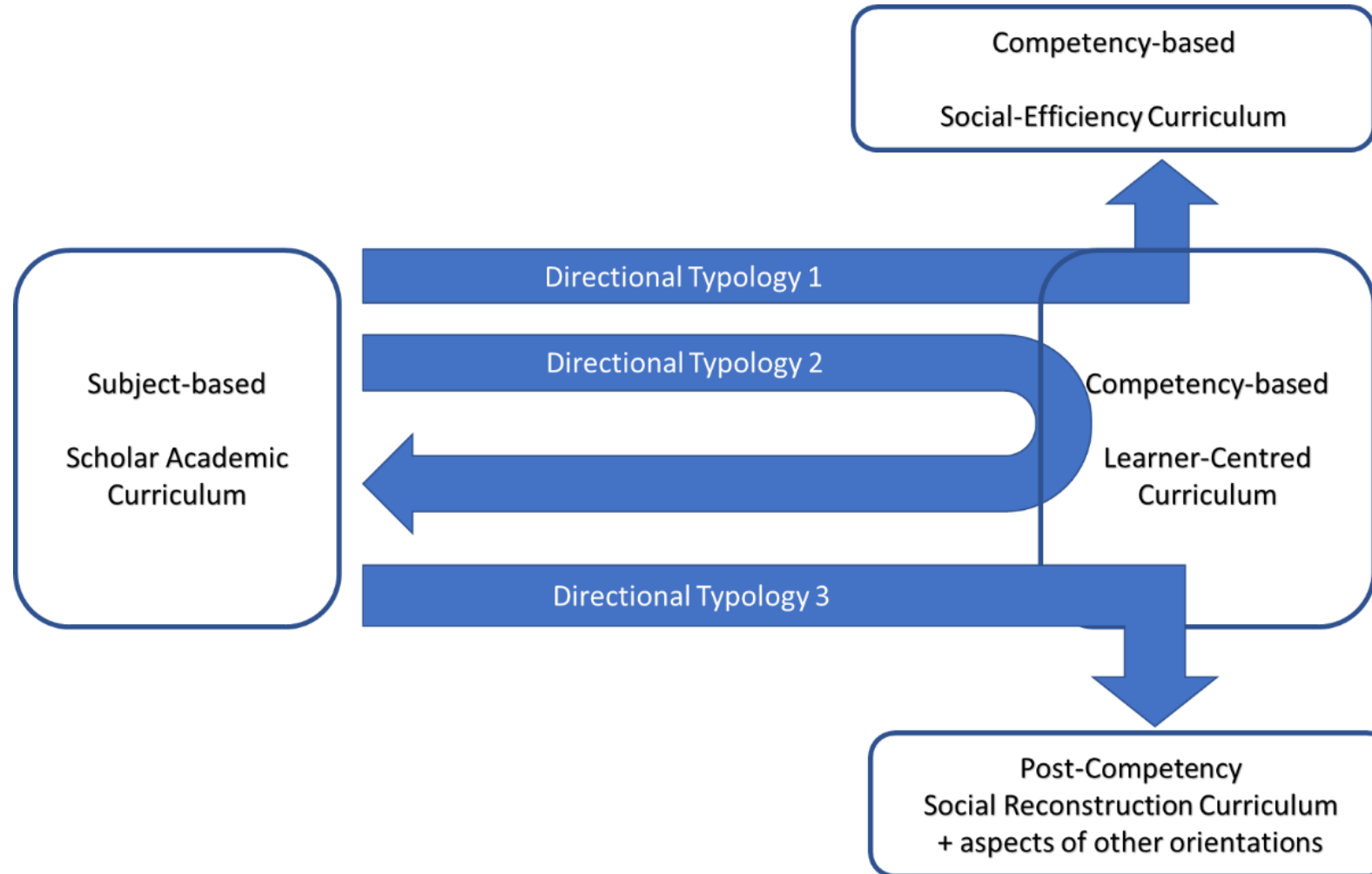


International trends in curriculum policy

- Common trends across the globe include:
 - Similar discourses and terminology between contexts.
 - A shared emphasis on education as a response to global and local challenges.
 - A belief that education is the means through which individuals become equipped to contribute to society.
- Key distinctions across the globe include:
 - Different understandings of shared concepts such as 'competency curriculum'.
 - Different core values and ethical stances underpinning curricula.

(Priestley et al., 2023)

Directions of travel



Curriculum as social practice

“The multi-layered social practices, including content selection, infrastructure, pedagogy and assessment, through which education is structured, enacted and evaluated” (Priestley et al., 2021).

At least three dimensions.

- ***The notion of curriculum as social practice***; something that is made by practitioners and other actors working with each other.
- ***The multiple layers or sites of education systems***, across which curriculum is made in its various forms, for example schools and district offices, policymaking arenas, and national agencies.
- ***Practices which comprise curriculum***: the selection of knowledge/content; pedagogical approaches; organization of teaching (e.g., timetabling); and the production of resources and infrastructure for supporting curriculum making in schools.



Systemic curriculum [making]

- “...is a complex system involving teachers, students, curricular content, social settings, and all manner of impinging matters ranging from the local to the international. It is a system that needs to be understood systemically. **The question is not which of the various factors explain high achievement, the current crime-solving model at work in the literature, but, rather, how it all works together.**” (Connelly, 2013, ix).
- **“A complex web of enactment”** (Priestley & Philippou, 2018, p151)

Site of activity	Examples of activity	Examples of actors
Supra	What matters: curricular discourse generation, policy borrowing and lending; policy learning	OECD; World Bank; UNESCO; national policy actors; communities
Macro	Development of curriculum policy frameworks; legislation to establish agencies and infrastructure	National governments; curriculum agencies; teachers
Meso	Production of guidance; leadership of and support for curriculum making; production of resources	National governments; curriculum agencies; district authorities; textbook publishers; curriculum brokers; teachers
Micro	School level curriculum making: programme design; lesson-planning	Principals; senior leaders; middle leaders; teachers; students
Nano	Curriculum making in classrooms and other learning spaces: pedagogic interactions; curriculum events	Teachers; students

- Different forms of curriculum making occur across various **sites of activity**
- We need to think **systemically** when reforming the curriculum
- If the important curriculum is the nano, then the system should be geared to supporting this – not vice versa.
- We build capacity through key actors (e.g., teachers) engaging in curriculum making across different sites (e.g., Welsh Pioneer Teachers as macro, meso, micro and nano actors).
- The importance of meso curriculum making as the mediating factor between policy and practice – making the abstract concrete

(Priestley et al, 2021)



RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS

EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS

SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS

CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS

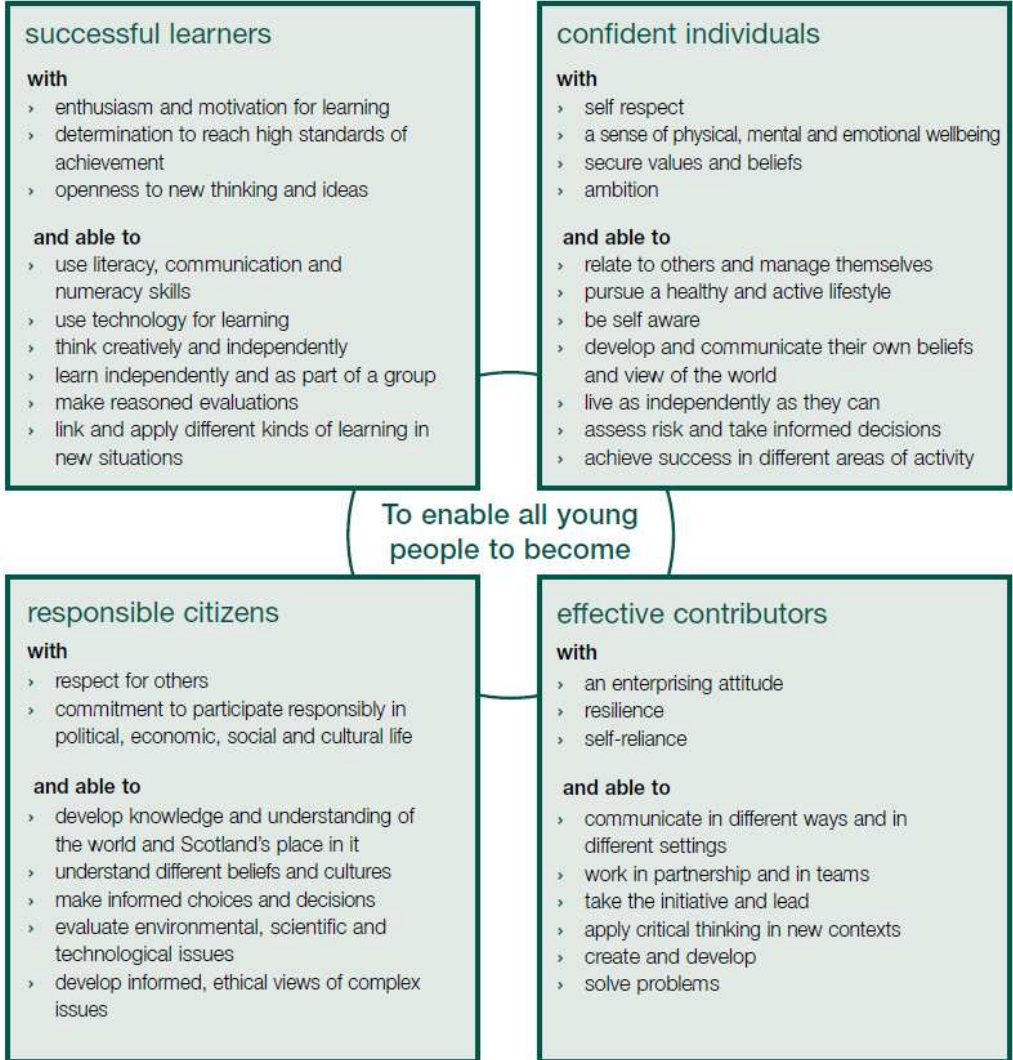
The Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)

- make learning **active, challenging and enjoyable**
- not be too **fragmented or over-crowded** with content
- **connect the various stages** of learning from 3 to 18
- encourage the development of high levels of accomplishment and intellectual skill
- include a wide range of experiences and achieve a suitable blend of what has traditionally been seen as 'academic' and 'vocational'
- give opportunities for children to **make appropriate choices to meet their individual interests and needs**, while ensuring that these choices lead to successful outcomes
- ensure that **assessment supports learning**

(Scottish Executive, 2004)

The Four Capacities

A set of generic competences, but initially framed as **educational purposes**



Experiences and Outcomes (Es & Os)

People, past events and societies (continued)				
Early	First	Second	Third	Fourth
<p>I have explored how people lived in the past and have used imaginative play to show how their lives were different from my own and the people around me.</p> <p>SOC 0-04a</p>	<p>I can compare aspects of people's daily lives in the past with my own by using historical evidence or the experience of recreating an historical setting.</p> <p>SOC 1-04a</p>	<p>I can compare and contrast a society in the past with my own and contribute to a discussion of the similarities and differences.</p> <p>SOC 2-04a</p>	<p>I can explain the similarities and differences between the lifestyles, values and attitudes of people in the past by comparing Scotland with a society in Europe or elsewhere.</p> <p>SOC 3-04a</p>	<p>By studying groups in past societies who experienced inequality, I can explain the reasons for the inequality and evaluate how groups or individuals addressed it.</p> <p>SOC 4-04a</p> <p>I can describe the main features of conflicting world belief systems in the past and can present informed views on the consequences of such conflict for societies then and since.</p> <p>SOC 4-04b</p> <p>I can make reasoned judgements about how the exercise of power affects the rights and responsibilities of citizens by comparing a more democratic and a less democratic society.</p> <p>SOC 4-04c</p>



Critique

- Privileges skills over knowledge
 - A downgrading of knowledge (Priestley and Sinnema, 2014)
- Lack of clarity (Priestley and Minty, 2013)
- Driven by measurement/data – encourages an instrumental approach to curriculum making.
- Bureaucratic with serious workload implications
- Poor implementation and lack of a review process
- Piecemeal and incremental policy changes over time have exacerbated the problems CfE was supposed to address



Primary schools

- The mythology that primaries do CfE, and secondaries struggle
- Research (e.g., Priestley & Minty, 2013; Priestley et al. 2015) and more recent anecdotal evidence suggests:
 - Attempts to operate CfE like previous 5-14, and audit approaches to curriculum making
 - Poor understanding of 'vague' Es & Os.
 - Lots of activity, but not always purposeful
 - Insufficient attention to developing knowledge systematically
 - Equity issues, as schools do very different things
 - An over-emphasis on what is tested – literacy/numeracy
 - Decline of areas such as expressive arts – 'a virtual disappearance' of some subject areas
 - Further limits on provision where expertise is in short supply (e.g., science)

Has CfE been implemented as intended in Scottish secondary schools?

Research suggests that CfE has not been implemented as intended in Scottish secondaries:

- Continued dominance of attainment agendas
- Persistence of former curricular structures (framed around subjects)
- A focus on attainment in National Qualifications – National 5 (15 years) and Higher (16 years)
- High profile of attainment as a criterion in inspections and audits
- A lack of attention to curricular purposes

Evidence of:

- Curriculum narrowing in the Senior Phase– an unintended consequence of the new National Qualifications
- Fragmentation and lack of coherence in the earlier Broad General Education phase (and little attention to its development)
- Misalignment between the curriculum and assessment
- Disjuncture between Broad General Education phase and Senior Phase
- The Senior Phase exerts a significant backwash effect on the Broad General Education phase (OECD, 2015; OECD, 2021; Shapira et al., 2023)

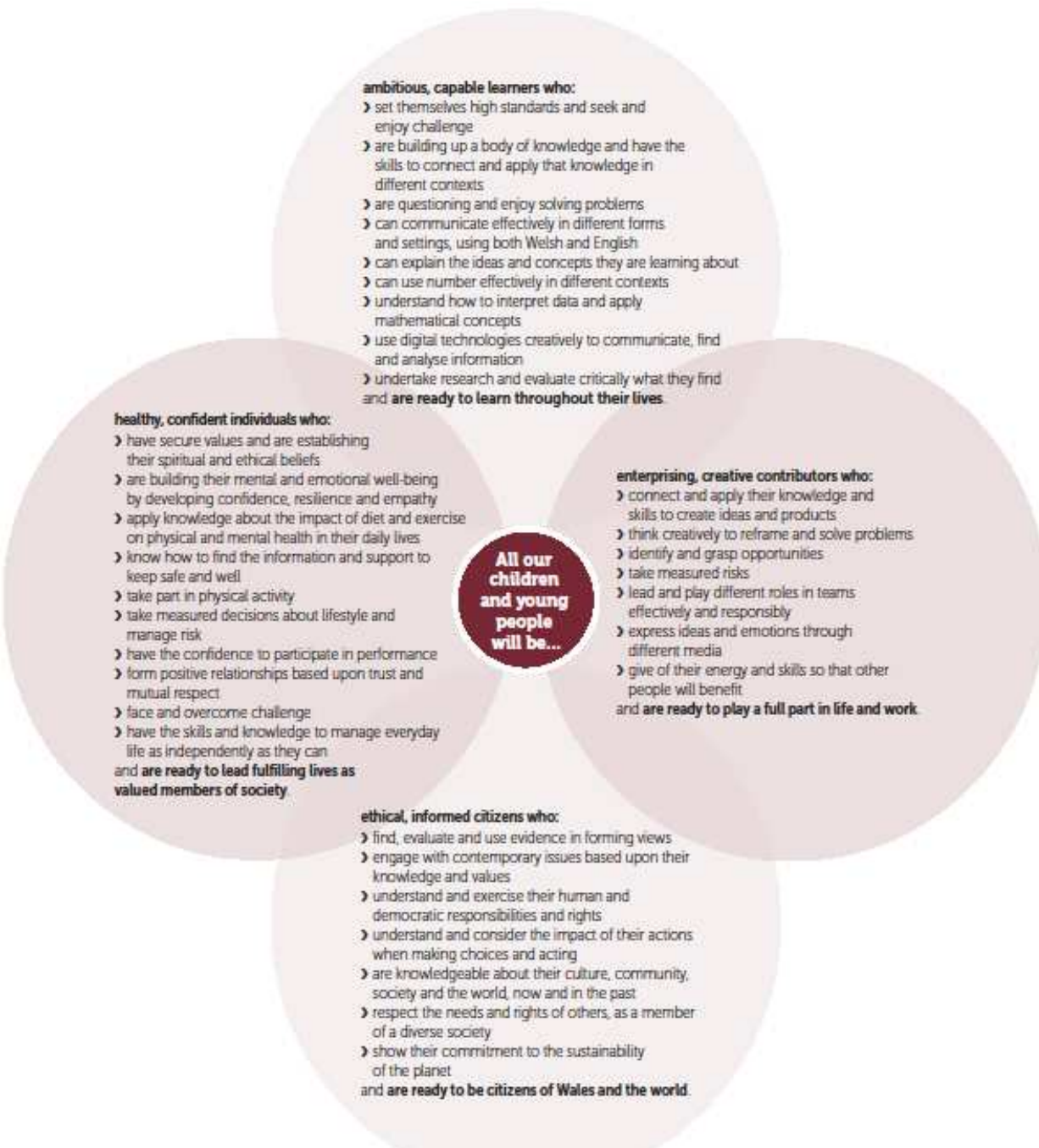
Wales – similar but different

Similar

- Top-level competencies (4 Purposes)
- Learning Outcomes (Descriptions of Learning)

Different

- Progression narratives (What Matters statements)
- Bigger emphasis on conceptual knowledge
- Purposes-led – clear connections between purposes and practices
- Fewer domains of knowledge (which look less like traditional subjects)
- Explicit connections between curriculum and professional learning (plus support)



“Humanities is central to learners becoming **ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.**” (Purpose)

“Events and human experiences are complex, and are perceived, interpreted and represented in different ways.” (What matters?)

“Deepening understanding of the ideas and disciplines within Areas” (Guiding principle)

THE WELSH CURRICULUM

Descriptions of Learning

- ▼ **Events and human experiences are complex, and are perceived, interpreted and represented in different ways.**

Progression step 1

I can form and express simple opinions about my likes and dislikes.

Progression step 2

I can form and express opinions about something that is important to me, considering my own ideas, feelings and those of others.

I can recognise and explain that my opinions and the opinions of others have value.

I can recognise that opinions may change over time.

I am beginning to recognise other people's feelings and viewpoints about familiar events or experiences.

Progression step 3

I can form, express and discuss my own opinions on a range of issues after considering evidence and the views of others.

I can [infer](#) and compare people's opinions, viewpoints and interpretations from sources and evidence.

I can use evidence to explain how aspects of the past have been represented and interpreted in different ways.

I can begin to understand that interpretations are influenced by identity, experiences, viewpoints and beliefs.



How is it going?

- Early days, but mixed picture emerging:
 - Difficulties in introducing a complex new curriculum – teacher understanding, school culture, legacy of an attainment driven system
 - Evidence of developing practices –enthusiasm, engagement, professional learning, innovation, etc.
 - Well-developed teacher networks to support curriculum making

Site of activity	Implications for your curriculum
Macro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A clear set of purposes ○ An appropriate technical curriculum form ○ The right sort of specification ○ The right structure and methodology for qualifications ○ <u>Subsidiarity</u> • Infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A strategic-level national curriculum agency ○ Establishing national level operational agencies – awarding, curriculum development, support and resources
Meso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum development, support and resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support, not measurement ○ Professional Networks, embedded in the work of schools and colleges – part-time secondments (cf. Welsh Teacher networks or JCS in Ireland) ○ Subject networks; cross-curricular networks; assessment and moderation networks; peer evaluation networks ○ Resource production – stop reinventing the wheel
Micro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher agency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creating the conditions – capacity, resources, permissions, trust, a safe environment etc. – for meaningful curriculum making by teachers



A balancing act

- Between:
 - Top-down and bottom-up approaches
 - Central specification and local flexibility
 - Trust and risk management
 - Different purposes of education
 - Different types of expertise
- And above all:
 - Simplicity matters – complexity quickly becomes complication and confusion

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