



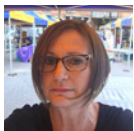
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Exploring Task Design as an Enabler of Leading Teaching in Secondary Schools

Practical curriculum development through the use of theory



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The introduction of a new education inspection framework in 2019 (Ofsted, 2019a) – and the curriculum workshop (Ofsted, 2018a), consultation (Muijs, 2018) and research processes (Ofsted, 2018b, 2018c, 2019b) that preceded its introduction – have led to a renewed focus on each school's position in relation to their curriculum. This shift in emphasis comes in the wake of the recent changes to the GCSE syllabi specifications, which resulted in a great deal more content needing to be covered in years 10 and 11 of the secondary school curriculum.

Curriculum now stands centre stage in the accountability culture of the system. What's wrong with that? As Connelly argues in his consideration of that great curriculum thinker, Joseph Schwab, and his work on curriculum and education reform:

'Curriculum is nexus, central to educational enterprise. Educational thought ultimately comes down to curriculum thought and I believe that revivifying curriculum in everyday educational discourse would be beneficial.'
(Connelly, 2013, p. 632).

Perhaps there are two issues with the nature of the current focus on the curriculum. First is that the curriculum in schools is being represented by the ‘three Is’ as introduced by Ofsted: intent, implementation and impact. In practice, it appears that these terms actually signify ‘teach, plan and assess’. Why is it, then, that schools appear to feel that they need to adopt the three Is? To tick a box to show that they are ‘in tune’ with the new framework? The second issue is that the role of teacher knowledge, and ideas about the configuration of the curriculum through a focus on the agency of teachers, appears to be being sidelined. If this iteration of education inspection framework heralds a resurgence of studies focussing on the curriculum and curriculum theory, then teacher agency (Priestley, 2015; Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015; Biesta, 2015) should have a part to play in making the most of this opportunity.

Task design is a great lens through which teachers can examine the curriculum.

‘The task a teacher defines for a lesson or unit shape how pupils engage intellectually with the content of the curriculum, what tools and strategies they learn to use with this content, and what learning capacities they take away from these curriculum encounters. Teacher actions, regardless of their inherent ‘quality’, that do not have an instrumental connection to the task students are working on are unlikely to have much effect on learning and development. Tasks, in other words, instantiate the curriculum in a classroom. They are the curriculum in motion – the actual curriculum that is taught – and they embody a teacher’s understanding of the content as educative experience. Task design and enactment, then, are at the core of the work of teaching.’
(Doyle, 2015)

Getting educational research about the design of tasks (see for example Thompson, 2015; Edwards, 2015; Todd, 2015) into the curriculum debates happening now in schools and classrooms might shift thinking around the theory–practice gap. As Oancea (2019) has argued, theory and practice have much in common: inquisitiveness, tools and virtues. The instrumental benefits of task design theory shaping curriculum development in schools will support teachers to think critically about and use the curriculum they teach day by day: the idea of task as a concept is of practical use when enacting the curriculum; schools can debate what a good task looks like; and teachers of subjects can plan together to consider questions such as, What does a history or science or art task look like for me as a school teacher of that subject? (Doyle, 2013).

Ofsted, in its research into the current state of the curriculum (Ofsted, 2018b), argued that many

teachers were unable to reflect upon and debate the curriculum they taught. The tasks teachers design create the environment that shapes the kind of learners and the kind of society we have (Edwards, 2015). So let’s use the current curriculum development focus in schools to create that space for teachers to reflect and debate: teachers need to talk about the values that motivate them and shape their teaching. ■

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