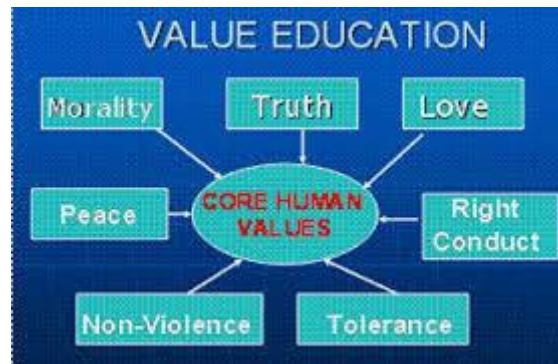# Towards a Values-Led Redevelopment of the Primary Curriculum

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Brian Ruane, an inspiring friend and colleague

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1 Introduction

'It will be helpful if we distinguish the use of the word "curriculum" to denote the content of a particular subject or area of study from the use of it to refer to the total programme of an educational institution' (Kelly 2013: 7)

This review essay has a very particular remit, to explore some of these most significant recent discussions on philosophies and aims of education and the contemporary meta-level vision for curriculum. The latter space is currently a very energised and inspiring scene of interpretation and school practice, both nationally and internationally. This review task takes its focus and purpose in early 2018 from the proposed redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum in Ireland by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the question of how such philosophies of education might inform our conception of such a redeveloped curriculum. The 1999 Curriculum was described in its own introduction as exemplifying –

the philosophical thrust of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971) and the Education Act, 1998 (Martin 1999; my emphasis).

But what of the 'philosophical thrust' and vision of the forthcoming curriculum process? If the 1999 Curriculum incorporated the then 'current educational thinking and the most innovative and effective pedagogical practice' (DES 1999: 10), how can we map our current educational understandings, theoretical and practical? The proposal for this new curriculum emerges in the context of significant and related curricular change in the Irish education system more broadly[1]. The current Primary School Curriculum dates from twenty years ago, although given that the development took place over the previous decade, we are going back thirty years previous (Walsh 2018).

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[1] Late 2009 saw the publication of *Aistear*: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for children from birth to six years and from 2014, the phased introduction of a new Junior Cycle experience in lower secondary education. This has necessitated greater curriculum alignment and continuity across all phases in the Irish education system from early childhood through to senior cycle. At curriculum level, there have been calls for increased time to be allocated to existing primary curriculum areas and requests for the inclusion of new curriculum areas including Coding, Modern Languages, Education about Regions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics and Wellbeing. The first phase of this redevelopment work considered the primary curriculum structure and how time is allocated across it. The key messages from this phase of development in 2017 together with previous work by the NCCA such as the identification of priorities for a primary curriculum (NCCA 2012) and an extensive body of research, will now inform the second phase of curriculum redevelopment work including the authoring a new draft overview / Introduction to the curriculum. This draft iteration when completed will be the focus of public consultation in 2019.

One of our key thematics here will be the question of what has changed in the interim from a social and educational perspective in Ireland, and internationally, that impacts crucially on curriculum? If the forces of 'globalisation' were already emergent in the 1990s, they have only become more acute in the intervening decades. If with Hargreaves, the paradigm aspects of globalisation are 'economic activity, political relations, information communications and technology' (quoted Sugrue 2004b: 2), we can say that in comparison with the 1999 Curriculum space, each of these dimensions is also more influential on our education system and school classrooms than ever before. Moreover, whereas many of the earlier curriculum documents refer to 'preparing children for a modern world', it is now clear that we have made the full move to what Lyotard called the 'postmodern' epoch (Lyotard 1986). If the latter has an economic foundation of neoliberalism and an attendant rapid expansion of technologisation (most notably, in the impact of the latter on childhood), it has also given rise to a much more complex sphere of values and values contestation. This is clarified by Lyotard when he describes the philosophy of the 'postmodern' as 'an incredulity towards meta-narratives' (Lyotard 1986), **the inability in our values approaches to validate a universal perspective**. We now encounter in society, and in education, a plurality of differing (and sometimes radically incompatible) perspectives while more traditional macro-level truth claims (theological or otherwise) have been somewhat delegitimated. As Parekh powerfully notes:

Multicultural societies throw up problems that have no parallel in history. They need to find ways of reconciling unity and diversity, being inclusive without being assimilationist, cherishing plural cultural identities without weakening the precious identity of shared citizenship' (Parekh 2005: 35).

In a specifically Irish context, over recent decades, the society has been undergoing major political, social, economic, cultural, demographic and educational change. With regard to specific values questions, for example, the Report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism drew attention to 'the greater diversity of religious belief systems and the more multicultural composition of the population' as being especially noteworthy with regard to educational change, as well as the emergence of a set of significant 'nonreligious' worldviews in Irish society (Forum 2012: 1). It also noted the need for the primary school system to now adapt to the needs of a more diverse Irish society. We can cite here Charles Taylor's discourse on 'the politics of recognition' as appropriate to describe this changing Irish society (Taylor 1994). For Taylor, **key to the societal debate are the concepts of recognition and identity**. This discourse looks back in an earlier generation to Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work on feminism, gender equality and more broadly, what she terms 'an ethics of ambiguity'

(Beauvoir 1976). Identity designates something like a person's understanding of who they are; of their fundamental defining characteristics as a person and is multi-faceted whether in terms of our ethnicity, our gender, our beliefs, our sexual orientation, our language etc. We have come to assume, Taylor is claiming, that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, much as Beauvoir referred to women as being disadvantaged as 'the second sex', or Fanon referred to what he termed 'Third World' (colonial) subjects as being treated as 'the wretched of the earth' (Fanon 1986).

Thus, a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or contemptible picture of themselves ((Taylor 1994: 25ff.). Nonrecognition or misrecognition (what Eamonn Callan calls 'chauvinism'[Callan 2004]) can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, thus imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being. The challenge for Taylor is thus to seek a more genuine equality of recognition but this aspiration struggles to be achieved in the postmodern world we described above, where, as Lyotard tells us, (Lyotard 1986), there is an inability in our values approaches to validate a universal perspective. Such debates concerning identity and recognition are much more overt in Irish society in 2018 than they were in 1999 or earlier decades. But **as the Forum asked, how can the Irish primary school system suitably adapt to the needs of this strikingly more diverse Irish society?** Values in and of education are right at the heart of this societal debate with regard to how we recognise such diversity of identity from early childhood. This will be a theme we will return to below, as it is a question (and problem) of values with crucial importance for the vision of curriculum.

How, then, has our pedagogical vision changed since the original curricular launch in 1999? Moreover, what are, or should be, our fundamental curricular priorities in reckoning with such changes? Specific questions become foregrounded in this analysis –

- *What is our vision for primary education and curriculum?*
- *Is there a philosophy of Irish education and curriculum?*
- *Child-centred or teacher-centred or both?*
- *What does a values-led curriculum mean?*
- *Finally, what are the implications of this research and values-informed analysis for curriculum design, curriculum development and curriculum implementation?*

2 What is Our Vision for Primary Education?

Let us forefront that big question – **what is education for and, more specifically, what is our vision for Primary Education?** In the history of philosophy and of education, individual thinkers consider themselves to have solved this question once and for all (Carr 2005a; Blake et al 2003b). Thus, we have different historic examples of assertions of what exactly education is and of what education is for.

- D.H. Lawrence claimed that education should aim to 'lead the individual nature in each man and woman to its true fullness',
- for Rousseau, the aim of education 'was to come into accord with the teaching of nature'
- Dewey considered that there must be a balance and an interplay between the development of the individual child and their socialisation as an active citizen
- A.S. Neill believed that 'the aim of education should be to make people happier, more secure, less neurotic, less prejudiced'
- Nell Noddings sees the flourishing and happiness of children as the purpose of education, but considers that schooling often causes the opposite effect[2]

(cf. Standish 2006: 221ff; Noddings 2003; Dewey 1973).

These emphases and aims of education continue to the present. We can note the important relationship between human rights and a vision of the education of children. Education is itself a right as defined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and with regard to childhood, is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Ruane and Waldron 2010: 1) in Articles 28 and 29. In the 1999 Primary Curriculum (DES 1999: 15), there are clear philosophical aims delineated at the beginning of the Introduction. There are three overarching aims of primary education stated:

- To enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual.
- To enable the child to develop as a social being through living and cooperating with others and so contribute to the good of society.

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[2] We note the recent NCCA conference, focusing on the dangers of narrow educational vision and assessment in Ireland. As Katherine Donnelly observes in an article tellingly entitled *'Stress test: the perils of all-or-nothing exams'*, 'the strains evident among students and parents are manifestations of a system that has evolved into a narrow funnel, where, after 13-14 years of school, outcomes are largely measured in a single set of terminal exams in June. And then, by how well the grades achieved translate into CAO points for college entry: the 'points race'''. *Irish Independent*, Monday 19.02.2018.

- To prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning.

We might see the emphasis on the individual child as close to Lawrence, the emphasis on environment as Rousseauist and the emphasis on lifelong learning as reminiscent of Neill's understanding of education (and Nodding's contemporary vision). We can note also here (as closely akin to Neill's statement) the strong values-education thematic emphasis of Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA 2009) – the framework describes children's development in terms of four paradigmatic themes of *'well-being'*, *'identity and belonging'*, *'communicating'* and *'exploring and thinking'*. Going back to the 1999 Curriculum, the aims are also connected (although it has been noted that the relations between 'aims' and 'vision' are somewhat unclear in that document) [Sugrue 2004b]) to what is referred to as the 'vision' of primary curriculum: here, three concepts of '*the uniqueness of the child'*, '*the child and society*' and '*education and society*' are foregrounded (DES 1999).

In more recent times, the experience of this contested and conflictual history of educational definition has led educationalists to point to the contingency and vulnerability of such overarching claims for educational aims and philosophy. As Paul Standish observes, for example, 'education is a changing contextual and often highly personalised, historically and politically constructed concept' (Standish 2006: 225) In a similar key, Andy Hargreaves influentially speaks of '*Changing Teachers, Changing Times…in the Postmodern Age*' (Hargreaves 1994).

Such relative contingency and vulnerability of definition in education does not have to be seen in a negative light. Rather it points to the diversity at the heart of educational practice and theory, and the complex relationships between the latter with regard to their impact on understandings of pedagogy and practices of teaching in schools (which of course also evolve in a constant dialectic with societal and cultural changes). As Standish notes, 'in sum the implications are not that the question of aims [in education] should be avoided but that it should be broached with greater reservations and sensitivity to this diversity' (Standish 2006: 223). For D.G. Mulcahy, it is precisely this openness which should also be characteristic of **curriculum** as such, 'seen as **a matter of ongoing discussion and revision** rather than one upon which we may seek convenient closure without undue consideration of its **ever-changing social, moral and intellectual underpinnings'** (Mulcahy 2004: xv).

We can see an increasing emergence and understanding of this matrix of educational issues in our public spheres. In Ireland, public debates have been an important stimulus to philosophical examination of educational issues. Some of the prominent political debates about education in recent years, including debates about *the impact of poverty on educational well-being and achievement*, *parental choice in education*, *public support for*

religious or secular schools, debates about LGBT rights in schools and *the accommodation of students with disabilities*, have been good candidates for philosophical inquiry. They also point to the need for a more fundamental vision of our educational values as such, as a society and educational system. We will return to this question below in our section on 'what does values-led mean?'.

Ironically, at the same time as these more holistic or pluralist philosophical tendencies in educational theory and policy, a narrower and more unequivocal ideology has emerged in educational systems which argues precisely against the above in the name of a self-evident type of supposed educational truth. Here, education becomes presented as an essentially practical activity, which is concerned with teaching and learning, curriculum and what goes on in schools exclusively. It is about achieving certain ends and those ends and methods are often prescribed for teachers, whose duty becomes one of 'delivering' these ends as outputs. This ideology of education has become known as **'managerialism'** and it stresses that the aims at a meta-level of education are uncontroversial, even commonsensical (Blake et al 2003: 1). As the European Union's White Paper on Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (a paradigm of this type of thinking) confidently asserted in 1996, debates over the aims of education are now at an end [European Commission 1996]. In other words, **the purpose of education is to serve the economy.**

We therefore have in education the emergence of clearly exclusive visions of curriculum in an international context, giving very different answers to the question – what is the purpose of primary education? *But how might we relate these overarching theories to our own vision of curriculum in Ireland, looking back to the 1999 Curriculum and towards the redevelopment process?*

3. Is there a Philosophy of Irish Education and Curriculum?

If we look back to the three aims of the 1999 Curriculum, we can say that while none of the aims explicitly point towards education as a means to economic profit that, in reality, educational rhetoric can be instrumentalised. Thus, the concepts of the 'good of society' and of 'lifelong learning' have sometimes been used precisely to consider the education of children as means rather than end. Moreover, in an Irish context, Ciaran Sugrue and Jim Gleeson [Sugrue 2004a] have pointed to crucial issues of power in the education system, with particular reference to curriculum. As Sugrue notes, 'various power brokers have sought to present curriculum change in *a value-neutral manner*, thus perpetuating an uncontested, unproblematic understanding of curriculum…Maintaining the status quo in curriculum terms while focusing on more technical aspects of the system' (Sugrue 2004b: 11; my emphasis).

Here, there is a declared need, instead of the top-down approach (which Sugrue associates with some of the problems with the 1999 curricular process), to ensure that '**the knowledge base of teaching can be built from the ground up'** (Sugrue 2004c: 204). This is an important and inspiring vision of the teacher and their role in curriculum development and we will return to it in the next section.

If the targeted enemy here of 'value-neutral' managerialism in education continues to be influential in some quarters, it is nonetheless true that it had its period of greatest dominance in the later 1990s, particularly in the UK (Blake et al 2003a; Goodson 2004). It is also the case that, in an Irish context, the model of social partnership as applied to education can be seen as preventing the full blown marketization or politicisation of curriculum (Granville 2004). More recently, in international contexts, there has been a counter-movement against value-neutrality which has seen **a re-emergence of a more pro-values (and 'existential'/'well-being') vision for education (**Greene and Griffiths 2003**;** Blake et al 2003a; Standish 2006; Irwin 2012; NCCA 2015, 2016a-b)[3]. This latter approach to education has been influential in Ireland on Early Childhood education in particular and the aforementioned thematic emphasis of <u>Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework</u>[4] (NCCA 2009). But in this context of increased interest in and recognition of the importance of the values of education as such, we are faced with some significant questions and dilemmas regarding how such a renewed vision might influence a restructuring of the primary curriculum.

Morgan (2014) while **advocating an 'incremental'** rather than Piagetian **model of stages of child development**, at the same time argues for a compatibility between a stage model and a universal model of education. 'Particular stress has been given to the finding that

[3] Michael Apple, for example, is also important in highlighting the emergence of a counter-culture in education and schooling based around the notion of 'Democratic Schools'. Apple seeks to tell the stories of these counter-cultural schools as a way of interrupting the right-wing tendency in education and showing in practice that it is possible to engage in socially and educationally critical activities that solve real problems in real schools in real communities (Apple 2000). Apple's work is also important in that it engages overtly with curriculum issues and his tenure at Illinois connects directly back to the seminal curriculum theory of Huebner, amongst others (Huebner 1974/1999; Pinar 2011; Schubert 1993).

[4] We can note here **the general aims** of *Aistear* as connecting clearly with our discussion. *Aistear* has two broad aims for all children from birth to six years (NCCA 2009): '1. to help all children develop as competent and confident learners within loving relationships with other, recognising that each child is unique with his/her own set of strengths, abilities, interests and trends. 2. to celebrate early childhood as a meaningful life-stage and as a time of being rather than becoming'. The *Aistear* vision is clearly on the side of what I am referring to as the **pro-values (and 'existential'/'well-being') vision for education (**Greene and Griffiths 2003). Maxine Greene's conception of aesthetic education as an overall ontology for education is especially important in this context.

certain features and principles are conducive to learning at all stages including engagement, teacher-student relationship and home-school interaction. However, how such principles should be operationalized will differ according to the child's stage of development. In other words, there is no conflict between a stage model and a universal model of learning' (Morgan 2014: 12). Consequently, while one can argue for 2 or 3 stage approach to primary curriculum on this basis, one might also argue for a more consistent, unified curricular approach at primary level (although the curriculum would need to be significantly more sensitive to stage differentiation than currently). This second approach would base its pedagogic vision on Morgan's 'universal model of education' (while recognising the importance of stages), while the first approach bases its pedagogic vision on Morgan's 'incremental stages' model (while nonetheless recognising an underlying universality in child development). The incremental stages approach is the one suggested in the most recent NCCA Consultation on Time Allocation and Structures in the Redeveloped Curriculum [NCCA 2018] (with an option given of either 2 or 3 stages of curriculum). Morgan (2014) indicates that a 3-stage model is 'implicit' in his analysis and the NCCA Final Report suggests that from the consultation, there was a noted preference for the 3 stage model. For example, through the bi-lateral meetings, it is noted that there was a strong view that 'there is a natural progression from themes to curriculum areas and on to subjects' (NCCA 2018: 20).

All things considered in the redevelopment curriculum process to date, then, we can see certain emergent emphases but there is also much left to be discussed, considered and argued for or against. We might divide some initial questions schematically into **philosophical** curricular issues (it is hoped that these questions might serve as the basis for further discussion, refinement and, of course, for the emergence of new and different questions).

Philosophy of Curriculum questions

1. If the 'philosophical thrust' of the 1999 Curriculum is somewhat unclear (Sugrue 2004b; Walsh 2018), what philosophy of education might be developed more systematically for the process of redevelopment 2018-?

2. What are the advantages of a child-centred curriculum or a teacher-centred curriculum, or a mix of both approaches? What theoretical frameworks might we use to develop a justifiable rationale for our overall meta-level approach to curriculum? (e.g. Deweyan/Freirean/Feminist(Greene)).

3. What is the relationship between epistemology and our vision for curriculum? For example, constructivism plays a paradigmatic role in the 1999 Curriculum but the Religious education (and Ethics) programmes are mostly grounded in a realist epistemology. Is there a tension here?

4. Recent literature suggests strongly that constructivism is a theory of learning rather than an overarching theory of education or curriculum (Philips 2003; Biesta 2017) and that curriculum and the flourishing of children in schools suffers if a theory of learning is substituted for an overall values-led education. Biesta calls this 'learnification'. Is this true?

5. What is the relationship between a national Primary Curriculum and a Patron's programme[5]? Are the values of the former always compatible with the values of the latter, and if not, who adjudicates to develop a consistency of values in our schools vis-à-vis our overarching curricular values? To what extent, if any, should the relationship be reconfigured through the 2018- process of redevelopment??

6. Is the 'partnership model' the best approach to curriculum development in Ireland or does it foster a 'cosy consensus' (Sugrue and Gleeson 2004)?

We will look at the first four questions in the next section on teaching and children, and return to questions 5 and 6 in the concluding sections.

4 Child-centred or teacher-centred or both?

'Mankind likes to think in terms of extreme opposites. It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of Either-Or, between which it recognizes no intermediate possibilities' (Dewey 1973: 5).

At the heart of our vision of a good education is the figure of the teacher. At the beginning of this essay, we quoted A.V. Kelly on curriculum. 'It will be helpful if we distinguish the use of the word "curriculum" to denote the content of a particular subject or area of study from the use of it to refer to the total programme of an educational institution' (Kelly 2013: 7). For

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[5] 'The use of the term 'patron's programme' arises from the Education Act section 32 (d) which ensures that the Minister 'in each school day shall be such as to allow for such reasonable instruction time, as the board with the consent of the patron determines, for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school'. While such subjects have traditionally been of a religious nature, in more recent times patrons have developed ethical, philosophical, multi-belief and values education programmes. The term 'patron's programme' is inclusive of all programmes developed by patrons, be they religious, philosophical, ethical or secular in nature' (NCCA 2018: 72).

Kelly, curriculum design, development and implementation **must put the teacher at the heart of the process**. But since the advent of progressivism in the early twentieth century, there has increasingly emerged an educational vision for putting children rather than teachers at the heart of education – what is generally referred to as 'child-centred education'. This notwithstanding the fact that influential educationalists such as Paulo Freire have linked such approaches (sometimes devoid of a more socio-political commitment) to forms of what he calls, pejoratively, 'banking education' (Freire 1996). For Freire, much child-centred education undermines the 'teacher-student relationship', and is often aligned with a more individualistic emphasis in pedagogy which fails to support the wider school and community culture (Freire 1996: Irwin 2012). More recently, educationalists such as Gert Biesta have analogously critiqued child-centred education as being linked to an overemphasis on 'learning outcomes', creating a pedagogical culture of what Biesta refers to as 'learnification' (Biesta 2013).

In the 1999 Curriculum, there are many implicit signals that the latter is a 'child-centred curriculum'. We might note for example that while the 'child' is mentioned in each of the three general aims, that there is no explicit mention of teaching or teachers. In many respects, we can see the emergence and relative dominance of child-centred education as a result of the problems associated with traditional forms of teacher centred authority in education. In My Pedagogic Creed, John Dewey famously outlines five paradigm weaknesses of traditional education[6], which are:

- disconnection from experience

- disconnection from activity

- ignorance of the interest of students

- treating knowledge as purely formal

- maintaining discipline through external authority rather than through the engagement of children (Dewey 2009).

In contrast, Dewey considered that the school should become a community in itself, that children and active experiential learning should be at the heart of school and that authority should come from 'the internalised norms of living within such a community' (Pring 2007:

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[6] In a similar vein, Freire (in Pedagogy of the Oppressed) outlines his diagnosis of banking education and the 'contradictions' between teacher and student: '(a) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; (b) the teacher talks and the students listen – meekly; (c) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined' (Freire 1996: 54).

16). Dewey became the figurehead of the progressivist and child-centred movement in education, which is the origin of the current emphasis on child- and student-centredness as a paradigm of curriculum. But, crucially for our purposes, Dewey always held significant reservations about replacing teacher-centred with child-centred education. His reservations were very clear. As with Freire, for Dewey, too much emphasis on the child as such risks undermining the act of teaching, as well as the process of education itself. Child-centred education can simply operate as an 'inversion' of traditionalist education described above, getting rid of the bad but also of the good contained in the latter. It tends to replace the value of 'authority' with the value of 'freedom', but for Dewey this freedom risks becoming hollow and pointless without a strong educative context of teacher, school and community. The dual emphasis on what Rorty has called 'individualisation' and 'socialisation' are noticeable here, in a direct line of influence from Dewey's thought. As Rorty notes in his important essay, *'Education as Socialization and as Individualization'* (Rorty 1999: 127), 'I take myself, in holding these opinions, to be a fairly faithful follower of John Dewey. Socialization has to come before individuation, and education for freedom cannot begin before some constraints have been imposed'.

In a related key, the contemporary critique of child-centred education, from Biesta and others, argues that our current educational system reifies teacher agency. While we talk up 'teacher agency', the dominant culture of what Biesta calls 'learnification' and (endless) 'learning outcomes' infantilises both teachers and the education process itself (Biesta 2013); Biesta and Priestley 2013a)[7]. Education is 'never that children or students learn, but that they learn something, that they learn this for particular purposes, and that they learn this from someone' (Biesta 2013: 38). Lawn similarly (Lawn 1990: 25) refers to the 'moral craft of teaching…the real duty', but laments its marginalisation in the current climate.

Of course, we can admit that each of these critiques of child-centred education is perspectival and somewhat polemical, but they are certainly chastening enough to require some consideration of our educational and curricular assumptions in Ireland. Here, we might restate our question 2 above:

What are the advantages of a child-centred curriculum or a teacher-centred curriculum, or a mix of both approaches?

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[7] Biesta in his book <u>The Beautiful Risk of Education</u> (Biesta 2013) puts forward seven key areas for consideration as ideals or values of education and curriculum as such – they are *Creativity, Communication, Teaching, Learning, Emancipation, Democracy and Virtuosity* (note that he doesn't jettison 'learning' as a value, but contextualises it in a broader set of educational paradigms).

In an Irish educational context, it is important that we revisit in 2018 these ideological and philosophical discussions once more, concerning our possibilities in the vision and aims for a redeveloped curriculum. Curriculum as such should be 'seen as a matter of ongoing discussion and revision rather than one upon which we may seek convenient closure without undue consideration of its ever-changing social, moral and intellectual underpinnings' (Mulcahy 2004: xv). In this limited context, we are presented with three clear 'vision' options for a redeveloped curriculum in terms of 1. **Child-centred 2. Teacher-centred. 3. A dual approach** (of course there are many other possible approaches and variations on these three alternatives). Deciding on, and supporting, one of these approaches or another specific educational vision (while remembering the paradigm curriculum question '*who decides*?') would also overcome some of the confusions regarding the 'philosophical thrust' of the 1999 Curriculum (q.1 above), as well as the concerns around the lack of a theoretical framework for the latter (Sugrue 2004a; Walsh 2018) [q.2]. It might also help us to resolve or at least clarify some of the complex epistemological tensions, for example, between 'realist' epistemology and 'constructivist' epistemology notable in different subject areas [q.3/4]. We can develop this argument by looking at the supposed child-centred philosophy of the 1999 Curriculum.

We can say 'supposed' child-centred as there are mixed messages given by the curricular documents of 1999, which also stress the centrality of teaching, as well as the wider social context as educative. Drawing on Dewey's work, we can see the importance of the twin emphases on children *and* the wider social context here. This emphasis avoids an exclusive emphasis on child-centred education, which may seem initially to contradict the earlier curricular philosophy. But the original aims of the curriculum are also accompanied by a broader vision statement of education which alongside the very child-centred 'uniqueness of child' principle, also evokes the principles of 'child and society' and 'education and society', where the latter is referred to as a 'dynamic relationship' (DES 1999).

In other words, we can say that while the 1999 curriculum often seems to present itself as a 'child-centred curriculum', that this is in reality misleading. The original curriculum has a broader educative vision than exclusive child-oriented approaches and as such, is more consistent with the Deweyean approach we discussed above. There is also at the very least a tension between what might be called the broader 'socio-political' vision of the 1999 curriculum and a simultaneous emphasis on 'constructivism'[8].

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[8] D.C. Phillips and others (including Biesta) have argued strongly against what they see as a misguided dominance of 'constructivism', as what D.C. Phillips has referred to as a 'secular religion', or as the 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: The Many Faces of Constructivism'. Rather damningly, Philips describes this malaise as one where 'a weak or at least a

In conclusion to this section then, we can clarify several aspects of the questions concerning the child-centred approach of 1999.

- Although it claims to be child-centred, the 1999 curriculum draws on a wider range of philosophies of education, including for example socio-political and Deweyan pedagogies
- The rationale is thus eclectic but also lacks coherence and consistency (Walsh [2018] refers to this tellingly as a problem of *'inclusivity over clarity'*). There is no literature review and thus no 'theory trail' to allow us to position the curriculum ideologically or in the literatures
- For the purposes of redevelopment, it is crucial to explore the strengths and weaknesses for example of child-centred and teacher-centred approaches, as well as other paradigms of education (rather than to simply assert a rhetoric around child-centred)
- It is also important that once a certain philosophy of education has been decided on as a vision of curriculum that it should be defined in coherent and consistent terms. Ivor Goodson refers to this problem (hardly unique to Ireland) as a 'crisis of positionality' (Goodson 2004: 25). **Thus, the task becomes one of overcoming this crisis through a clear and coherent curricular positioning, ideologically and theoretically.**

5 What does a values-led curriculum mean?

What are the values of a national curriculum? How might education overcome its aforementioned crisis through a clear and coherent curricular positioning, ideologically and theoretically? In an Irish context, it is striking that this issue has been somewhat occluded by more specific debates, whether about student outcomes and literacy or parental choice and schooling, or discussions around particular curricula (for example, in Language or in Maths). While the protagonists explore these concerns, the question of values is always present but it is rarely related to the question of the values of the Primary Curriculum as such. It is also notable that there are often unresolved tensions in these educational debates.

We can say, firstly, that the whole question of values education (and its relation to the values of curriculum as such) is a relatively recent area of concern in Irish education. It is also somewhat complicated by the system of 'patron' in the Irish school system (Norman 2003;

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controversial epistemology has become the basis for a strong pedagogic policy' (Phillips 1995: 10-11).

Rowe 2000). However, despite this specificity, there are also clear parallels with international educational concerns. Indeed, it could be argued that the tradition of patron's programmes and ethos in Irish schools (whether traditionally denominational or more recently, also multi-denominational) assures that the discussion of educational value is less easily reduced to simply a matter of 'economism' (UL 2016). Through the patron vision, whether denominational or multi-denominational, education is seen in broader and deeper terms than simply a means to preparing children for work. Taylor, for example, refers to the important difference between 'substantive' and 'procedural' visions of education and life. Substantive visions of education refer to having a 'views about the ends of life, about what constitutes a good life, which we and others ought to strive for' (Taylor 1994: 55ff.). In contrast, procedural understandings are more a matter of pragmatics, of agreeing to treat each other fairly, whether in school or in society (Taylor 1994: 55ff.)

Patron visions of education in Ireland have been substantive ones, whereas the economistic and managerial perspectives on education have been more procedural. Other commentators would argue that the tradition of patron's programmes has nonetheless hindered the evolution of an independent tradition of values education (Norman 2003; Rowe 2000). Here, the argument is that some forms of substantive vision for education can be very exclusive, 'one size fits all' and not respectful of different or minority views in schools. Nonetheless, whatever the school model or ethos, all schools increasingly recognise the complexity of provision for values in their contexts. Parekh notes the historic particularity of 'multicultural societies', seeking to reconcile unity and diversity, pluralism and shared citizenship (Parekh 2005: 35). One of the distinctive features of the Irish educational system, and especially at primary level, is the preponderance of denominational and faith based schooling. Currently, 96% of primary schools are denominational and 4% are multi-denominational. In this, we are in quite a singular position as a school system internationally, as Berit Askling notes:

Despite different national contexts, there is one striking similarity…the identified tension nowadays in religious education between the formerly self-evident linkage to Church and confessionalism and the increasing respectfulness to democratic values of pluralism in modern society (Askling 2000: 53).

If Ireland remains a strongly denominational system of education, it is however clear that, in all Irish schools, there is increasingly a recognition of the complexity of values education. One powerful example of this in recent times is the Sharing Inclusive Practice Network (NCCA 2017-) , where NCCA has been working with a network of primary schools to share examples of inclusive practice. The schools in this Network are both denominational and multi-denominational, and these shared practices relate to some of the teaching and learning

that was outlined in the proposals for Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics (NCCA 2015). More generally, it is clear that catering for diversity in Irish schools does not (and should not) solely focus on the religious and cultural dimensions of the student population. Figure 1 shows the matrix of variables involved in the provision of values education, either through discrete curricular approaches or through a whole school expression of characteristic spirit.
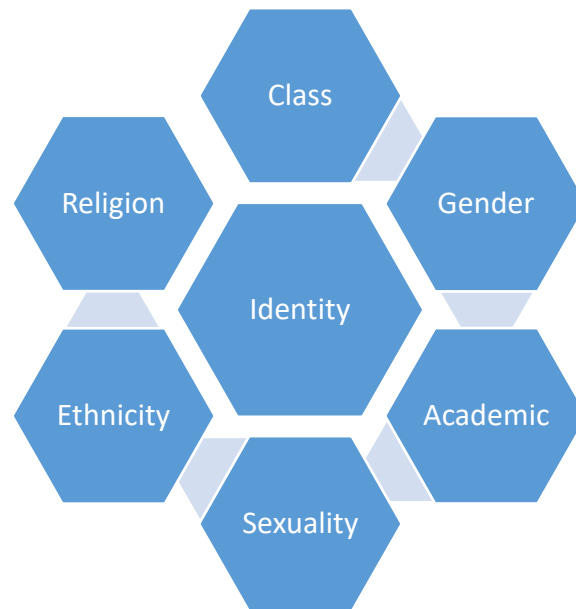
Class
Religion
Gender
Identity
Ethnicity
Academic
Sexuality

Figure 1 – A matrix of values and variables in an Irish school context.

We might remember Terence Mc Laughlin's wisdom that 'a school is engaged in a practical enterprise of great complexity which calls for many forms of practical knowledge' (McLaughlin, 2008: 204). Question 5 above indicated the complexity of approaching this matrix of values in Irish school contexts. It asked 'what is the relationship between a national Primary Curriculum and a Patron's programme? Are the values of the former always compatible with the values of the latter, and if not, who adjudicates to develop a consistency of values in our schools vis-à-vis our overarching curricular values?'. This is a challenge for all Irish primary schools in an increasingly differentiated school landscape. If these whole school approaches have traditionally been of a religious nature, in more recent times patrons have developed ethical, philosophical, multi-belief and values education programmes. (NCCA 2018: 72). Here we see the complexity at the heart of Irish values education. As Pring observes in relation to a more international context of education, we have, on the one side, 'a distinctive tradition of values and beliefs' (Pring 2008: 94ff.), and, on the other, the values of 'the liberal commitment to openness and diversity' or the 'maintenance of common values that ensure social cohesion and citizenship' (Pring 2008: 96). Bringing these two

domains of values together in Irish schools will certainly not be straightforward, but the redevelopment process of the primary curriculum will itself be a catalyst for such debates to happen. As noted above, the <u>Sharing Inclusive Practice Network</u> (NCCA 2017-) shows how much intersection of these spheres of values education, in specific ethos schools and across diverse ethos schools, is already taking place in Ireland.

6 What are the implications of this research and values-informed analysis for curriculum design, curriculum development and curriculum implementation*?*

Gary Granville, in his analysis of curriculum development in Ireland, states that 'participation and partnership have replaced the autocracy of the state in curriculum design' (Granville 2004:67ff.). The model of social partnership employed in Ireland and applied to education is one which, for the most part, seems to have protected our curriculum development from the worst excesses of the 'managerialism' earlier described. However, as Granville also warns, there are limitations to the partnership model of curriculum design and development. To go back to our question 6 above; *Is the 'partnership model' the best approach to curriculum development in Ireland or does it foster a 'cosy consensus'?* (Sugrue and Gleeson 2004). Granville, Sugrue and Gleeson all concur that a certain 'pragmatism' and 'compromise' tend to dominate over time.

Thus, despite the said advantages of this model, one can draw a line of causality from this model to some of the problems raised earlier in relation to a positionality of curriculum, and also perhaps to a certain marginalisation of theory, or theoretical curriculum studies, in curriculum development. It is noteworthy that Granville's analysis, for example, shows the third-level representatives on curriculum committees to be the most dissatisfied with the processes (Granville 2004: 84ff). While there may be all kind of individual reasons for this, it also points to a certain disjunction between these processes and structures, and the third-level sector of education. This is especially significant with regard to the relationship between curriculum development and the Initial Teacher Education sector, raising the important issue of how a redeveloped curriculum model, of the type proposed in primary school, might map onto the structure of Initial Teacher Education? Moreover, how can we model and plan the considerable co-operation between the curriculum redevelopment and the ITE sector in Ireland required in such a process?

Of course, these issues are not unique to Ireland. As suggested above, some of the difficulties internationally are more acute, in the absence of a social partnership model for education. Biesta, for example, proposes a view of the teacher as a *human being* rather than

a technician, which is fundamentally different than economic, scientific, political, or other functional views deriving from what he sees as the dominant international constructivist and/or instrumentalist curricular policy. If we see education as a 'risky endeavour', we realise that it is not a process that can or necessarily should be completely controlled.[9] Biesta notes what he sees as a very strong recent tendency to seek to control education and to 'make it into a machine for the production of a small set of 'learning outcomes.' 'It's this reduction that I find problematic, not just for the students who are subjected to it, but also for teachers who have to work in such systems.' (Biesta 2016: 2). What are the implications of such a view (shared by Stenhouse, Goodson, Pinar, Greene, amongst others) for our vision of values in and of curricular practice in Ireland?

In his advocation of 'democratic schools' (Apple 2000), Michael Apple also calls for a different approach to curriculum development and practice. He indicates the crucial changes required in our approach to curriculum as follows:

- the power of (collective) local decision-making

- a curriculum that comes from below, rather than from above

- that responds more and more to the needs, histories, and cultures of oppressed people, of people of colour, and of poor people

- a more socially responsive pedagogy

Apple's analysis and critique highlights two central issues for us in the context of curriculum development in Ireland.

1. First, what is the process of curriculum development itself? This also raises the related question of how the model of curriculum development relates to the model of curriculum implementation.

2. How does this model of curriculum development embody the values of the curriculum as such?

Both of these issues are very pressing in the contemporary Irish context. Apple's work has shown us a vision of education and curriculum which argues that it is possible to engage in

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[9] A somewhat more radical vision for educational transformation is notable in, for example, Biesta's interview with the American arts educator John Baldacchino, 'Weak Subjects. On Art's Art of Forgetting – An Interview with John Baldacchino by Gert Biesta' (Biesta and Baldacchino 2018). The educational philosophy of Ivan Illich is invoked here and his warning 'not to counter schooling with another form of schooling' but rather that 'what we need at this stage is a shift which cannot offer an alternative *but which seeks something totally different, almost unrelated to education as we know it'* (Biesta and Baldacchino 2018: 143) [my emphasis]. For Baldacchino, 'education cannot be reduced to a teleological project'.

socially and educationally critical activities that 'solve real problems in real schools in real communities' (Apple 2000). A.V. Kelly had foregrounded the 'process'[10] of curriculum, which he connected back to the work of Stenhouse and also of Dewey. For Stenhouse, we begin curriculum development by defining our 'value positions embodied in the curriculum specification' (Stenhouse 1970: 80; Kelly 2013:94), a clear set of principles which then allow us to build 'hypotheses concerning the effects [rather than] objectives' (Stenhouse 1970: 80). For Kelly, the advantage of **this process model of curriculum** is that **it 'encourages us to be much more tentative, less dogmatic and more aware of the possibility of failure and the need for corrective adjustments'** (Kelly 2013: 94). This also ties in with Dewey's argument in <u>My Pedagogic Creed</u> that 'the process and goal of education are one and the same thing'; aims are reflected in the processes and the processes are embedded in the aims, which are in perpetual need of **reconstruction**' (quoted Kelly 2013: 91). This model of process curriculum thus sets itself against a model of curriculum which would focus on the 'delivery of predetermined content or the achievement of prestated behavioural changes, or prestated and fixed aims and goals' (Kelly 2013: 96)[11].

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[10] The process curriculum model derives originally from Dewey's work but also links with more recent work by Stenhouse and Goodson, amongst others. One can also see its modelling in Freire's work on literacy education and curriculum (Freire 1996; Irwin 2012). This model stresses aims and values as fundamental and principles which become tested in practice, but de-emphasises objectives and outcomes based curriculum approaches. It emphasises a much greater connect between schools, curriculum development and university, allowing for a strong connect between daily practice in schools and current educational theory. It also foregrounds a more democratic, participatory model of curriculum. (Kelly 2013: 94ff; Pring 2007; Dewey 1973).

[11] If we think of this process curriculum in terms of values education, it is a less predetermined, more open set of values and an exploratory, educative approach to values. Here, we might contrast our diagram on the front of this paper for values with, for example. Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizome' of many plural roots (Deleuze and Guattari 2004; De Freitas 2012). Recent work in educational philosophy (especially in e*arly years*) has drawn on their work to study social interaction in educational contexts as a complex 'rhizomatic process'. According to this view, educational systems and subjectivities emerge and interact by way of discontinuity, rupture, and multiplicity in a vast interleaving rhizomatic assemblage. A rhizome is described as an acentric, nonhierarchical network of entangled and knotted loops, folding and growing through multiple sites of exit and entry (Deleuze and Guattari 2004; De Freitas 2012). Another connection here would be with Beauvoir's feminist '*ethics of ambiguity'*, where values are less definitive and more 'in process' (Beauvoir 1976). Figure 2 below graphs the rhizome.

This also links with Goodson (whose work explicitly acknowledges the influence of Stenhouse) and with the critique of learning outcomes and an educational culture of 'learnification' which we see in Biesta and Priestley's work (a significant example is their critique of the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence [CFE] (Biesta And Priestley 2013a). For Goodson, we need as educators to critique strongly the model of 'curriculum as prescription' (CAP), which only serves to 'support the mystique that expertise and control reside within central governments, educational bureaucracies or the university community' (Goodson 2007: 14). This is an inspiring but also difficult educational challenge, how to bring about the connects between communities, teachers, schools and policy bodies (what Goodson calls the '*theory-building meeting ground'* or '*middle ground theory*' of this matrix [Goodson 2004, 2007, 2014] or what Stenhouse called the *'story of action within a theory of context'* [Stenhouse 1970]).

What we need to avoid, as Goodson claims, is the 'disenfranchisement' of teachers and children/communities alike often under the guise of participation[12], curricular motifs of
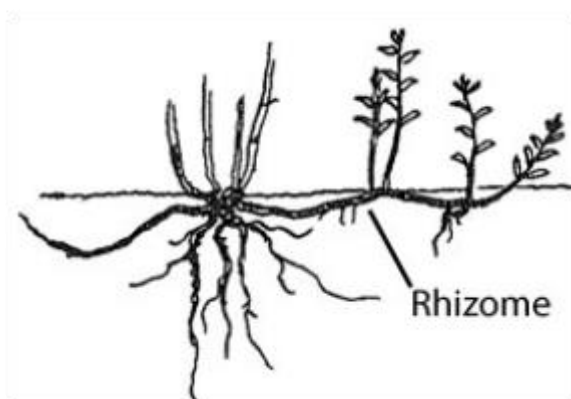

Figure 2 A diagram of the 'many roots' of a rhizome, which is an image of life and values education provided by Deleuze and Guattari. Cf. De Freitas (2012) 'The Classroom as Rhizome'.

[12] Here it seems appropriate in the questioning of the authenticity of 'participation', whether educational or political, to cite this forewarning poster from May '68 and the Situationist movement in France. 'Participation, it is all the better to eat you with my children'.

'teacher agency', mission statements of 'child-centred education'. For Goodson, such an alienation is endemic to the type of curricular and education vision of 'Curriculum as prescription' (CAP). In an Irish context of education, we have seen similar critique put forward of the preformed curriculum, for example by Sugrue and Gleeson (Sugrue 2004a: Sugrue and Gleeson 2004; Gleeson 2004). Significantly, Goodson also warns us as educationalists against over-reacting to this curricular malaise and simply asserting teachers as autonomous. In distinction to the CAP narrative:

A number of counter-narratives have sought to re-enter the practitioner's world and, explore research in this milieu; genres such as teacher's stories, 'reflective practice' and action research are examples of such a move back to action and practice. Nonetheless a survey of these genres reflects a common problem; in entering the teacher's practical world they have too often lost contact with the historical context of practice and with theoretical and disciplinary understanding generally.

Thus, in trying to bring the teacher back into educational study they have had the paradoxical result of weakening the teacher's understanding of context, politics, patterns and theories (Goodson 2007: 25 ff.).

Figure 3 – Situationist poster on Participation, Paris, May 1968. 'Participation, it is all the better to eat you with my children'!

This is an insightful and balanced diagnostic from Goodson. **But such difficulties are hardly insurmountable and continue to leave room for hope, inspiration and the possibility of good curricular and educational practice**. Perhaps, to conclude, we can foreground some of the most searching questions articulated by another great stalwart of curricular studies, W. H. Schubert (Schubert 1993). Schubert describes them as 'haunting questions; at the same time, they are the most hopeful questions we can ask' (Schubert 1993: 115). It is perhaps also appropriate, in a discussion of philosophies of education and values of education, to end with some provocative questions rather than with any definitive answers.

- *How can everyone play a key role?*
- *Do schools dare to change the social order?*
- *To centralize or to decentralize?*
- *Who decides?*
- *Do national standards fit the needs and interests of people who live in local contexts?*
- *Fundamentally, how can genuine grass roots curriculum development become a reality under the auspices of centralized standards?*
  (Schubert 1993: 115).

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