

Curriculum Design Statement 2017

The University of Cambridge Primary School is committed to exemplary teaching and learning. It aims to be bold, free thinking and rigorous; underpinned by a commitment to the values of excellence, equity and learner empowerment. We aim to be:

- **Ambitious:** everyone is encouraged and enabled to achieve and attain highly
- **Innovative:** the learning community benefits from belonging to a research and teacher education community both within the school itself and as part of wider University and school partnerships
- **Inclusive:** everyone is welcome and everyone included

Within the expectations defined by the National Curriculum and prompted by the Cambridge Primary Review, in designing our curriculum we asked a number of questions:

- What aims, value and principles should our curriculum pursue and enact?
- What are the implications of recent research on children's development and learning and on what they should be taught?
- What are children's 'lived world experiences'? What are the challenges of a super-globalised, politically, socially, environmentally and technologically uncertain world?
- How can a curriculum nurture children's childhoods as well as prepare them for an adult future?

A curriculum could be considered as the body of knowledge that is to be advanced through learning and teaching that is planned and guided. Sometimes the curriculum is equated with the syllabus which is to be taught. However, Kelly (2004) says this is a limiting conceptualisation¹. Instead, an *educational* curriculum must have principles beneath the taught curriculum. These principles in turn guide the ways we teach and the ways children will learn. As well as asking 'what knowledge will be taught?', we also asked, 'what will be the outcomes for children beyond grades and exam results?' and, 'How will they be as humans?'² Drawing from Kelly (2004) we agree that,

...within a democratic society, an educational curriculum at all levels should be concerned to provide a liberating experience by focusing on such things as the promotion of freedom and independence of thought, of social and political empowerment, of respect for the freedom of others, of an acceptance of variety of opinion, and of the enrichment of the life of every individual in that society, regardless of class, race or creed (p.3).

At the core of our curriculum: developing compassionate active citizens

As such, our principled approach to designing our curriculum is rooted in democratic notions of education (Dewey, 1916; Greene, 1995; Friere, 2001; Hart et al, 2004; Swann et al, 2012) in which children's voice is central: in which we empower children to make sense of the complex world in which

¹ Four ways of considering the curriculum: (1) Curriculum as a body of knowledge to be **transmitted**. (2) Curriculum as an attempt to achieve certain ends in students – **product**. (3) Curriculum as **process**. (4) Curriculum as **praxis**

² We asked children, parents and teachers what we would like the children to be like when they left our school (See Biddulph (2017: pp.99-118) and Appendix I)

they live (Rudduck and Flutter, 2004); in developing their ability to question; to discuss, challenge and contest diverse positions respectfully and compassionately; and to consider views about our world and how we should live in it. There is a critical thinking nature so that we question assumptions about truth and knowledge³. In understanding the intercultural communities in which we live, there is a need for children to learn with the diversities that exist in their local and global communities; inspired by the words of Lord Williams and the Cambridge Primary Review (2010),

‘If you’re going to be a decision-making citizen, you need to know how to make sense and how to recognise when someone is making sense...that there are different ways of making sense, different sorts of questions to ask about the world we’re in, and insofar as those questions are pursued with integrity and seriousness they should be heard seriously and charitably’ (Lord Williams, 2008; quoted in Alexander (2010: p.13))

At the core of our curriculum is the hope to nurture and develop **compassionate citizens** who want to make a positive contribution to their local and global worlds⁴. The curriculum passionately advocates to inspire a relentless optimism for and about children.

The enabling space of our curriculum: relationships and ethos

In order to develop compassionate citizens for now and the future, we realise that the ways we engage with children informally and formally throughout their time in school spaces and how they are engaged with at home, will determine how the principles are enacted and ‘lived out’. In the UK, the Warwick Commission Report (2015) reminds us that, globally, our education systems should be creative learning landscapes, infused with possibility spaces (Burnard et al, 2017). So, we aim to develop **enabling spaces** for possibilities to arise; spaces constructed collaboratively; that foster agency, communality and engender trust so that children can learn to make sense of uncertainties and complexities in learning. Following on from *Learning without Limits* (Hart et al 2004) and *Creating Learning without Limits* (Swann et al 2012) and aligned with the Cambridge Primary Review recommendations, the enabling space in our school is developed with trust, co-agency and an ethic of everybody as its foundations.

We define this enabling space as one infused with values of **empathy, respect, trust, courage and gratitude**. These are the guiding values of the school. Furthermore, there is also a range of evidence investigating the environmental contexts that support the development of children’s playfulness, oral language and other representational abilities, and their development as self-regulating learners. Broadly, this research (see Whitebread and Coltman, 2017) indicates the importance of an emotionally warm and positive social climate in the classroom, of high expectations and challenge, of support for children’s sense of autonomy and competence, and of opportunities for metacognitive talk when emotional and cognitive mental processes are articulated and discussed.

In these ways, the relationships forged through the explicit nurturing of our school values creates the enabling space which contextualises the curriculum design and the learning and teaching within it (see the golden framing of our curriculum model).

³ For example, in learning about an historic figure like Christopher Columbus, we ask the question, ‘*Did Columbus discover America?*’ which raises questions of immigration, invasion, power and colonisation. This criticality is handled sensitively as appropriate to children’s needs and ages. Another example would be to explore the opportunities as well as the issues arising from global trade (of chocolate for example). The aim is to develop knowledge and understanding for children to be able to articulate their position and respectfully engage in debate to develop compassionate responses.

⁴ These principles are consistent with our diversity statement and the UK government promotion of British values <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-fundamental-british-values-through-smsc>

Research-informed curriculum design: three pedagogic golden threads of our curriculum

From our review of the literature, and building from the work of the Faculty of Education, Cambridge University, we identify three golden threads that bind the curriculum together: **Habits of Mind, Dialogue and Oracy and Playful Enquiry.**

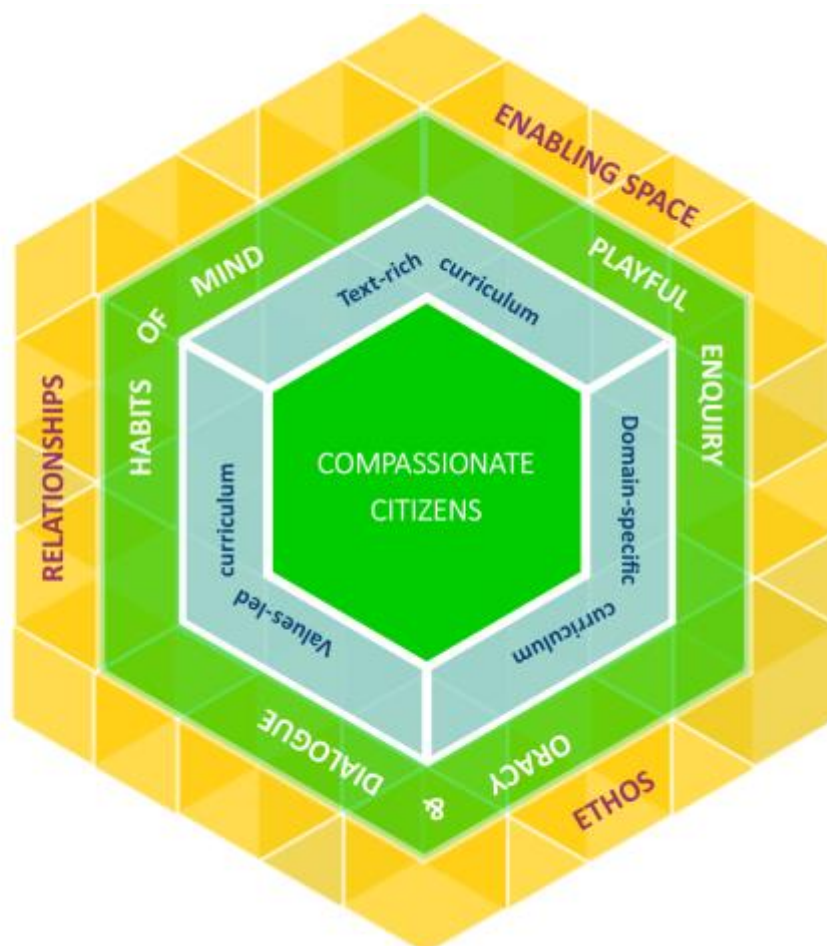


Figure: 1 The UCPS Curriculum Model 2017

Habits of Mind

The term “Habits of Mind” was used by Costa & Kallick (2008) who outlined and described sixteen psychological attributes and problem solving skills which when utilised aid the learning process. These aforementioned attributes range from developing a resilience when faced with new and unknown situations to reducing one’s impulsivity. Costa & Kallick (2008) postulate that the 16 Habits incorporate six dimensions: Value, Inclination, Sensitivity, Capability, Commitment and Policy (see appendix II for how these dimensions complement our school’s vision to help nurture compassionate citizens) and that it is the progression through these dimensions that see children be the problem solvers of the future.

The wide-ranging facets that Habits of Mind incorporate allow teachers to adapt their practice in the classroom to encourage children’s metacognitive understanding (thinking about thinking) and mental flexibility when solving problems. For example, having discussions with children about how they know what they know and providing resources so that children can utilise a variety of manipulatives to support their learning. Having an understanding of how they think enables children to progress further

and provide the foundations for lifelong learning (Martinez, 2006; Chatzipanteli, Grammatikopoulos & Gregoriadis, 2014).

Pedagogically, the Habits of Mind have close assimilation with Assessment for Learning (Black and William, 1998) in terms of empowering children to take ownership of their own learning and being their own agents for change. In many real senses, Habits of Mind is an extension of Assessment for Learning (AfL) as the 16 attributes create a holistic approach to learning and dedication to challenge and is designed to reduce the anxiety and fear of failure during the learning process.

At the University of Cambridge Primary School, we have incorporated the principles of Habits of Mind throughout our curriculum to ensure that progress is not simply academic but also social, spiritual and emotional. For example, children and adults conduct daily mindfulness in order to reduce impulsivity and increase our focus for learning. We also provide children with challenges that they choose themselves so that they have true agency over their progress and learning. It is our belief that when the learning behaviours that create the Habits of Mind have become habitual will our children go in to the world the compassionate citizens that we pride ourselves on nurturing.

Oracy and Dialogue

Within the context of a profoundly interconnected world facing various challenges, complex communication skills are widely recognised as invaluable characteristics of productive and intercultural citizens (Autor, Levy & Murnan, 2003; Tony Blair Faith Foundation, 2016). Embedded within school curriculum learning is the potential for learners to develop an ability to articulate thinking within a shared space with others; speakers and listeners 'inter-think' by building on the ideas of their own and others (Alexander, 2008). Dialogue has been defined as the 'kind of talk in which every answer gives rise to another question' (Phillipson & Wegerif, 2016). Evidence-based approaches employed at the University Primary School, such as *Philosophy for Children* enable learners to create and discuss their own questions, change their minds and use their peers as effective instructional resources (Educational Endowment Foundation, 2016). Within this dialogic space, the importance of learners being 'caring, collaborative, critical and creative' is emphasised (Phillipson & Wegerif, 2016). As such, dialogue is understood as reliant on and mediated by productive learner habits of mind such as reciprocity and developed cooperative learning skills (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, Kershner et al., 2012).

Using the Cambridge Oracy Skills Framework (Mercer et al., 2014), which sets out a comprehensive overview of the Physical, Linguistic, Cognitive and Social and Emotional aspects of effective dialogue, teachers are able to set out clear 'dialogic intention' for planning and assessing learning sequences, and work with systematically developing these. As well as curriculum-integrated opportunities such as debates or speeches, children at the University of Cambridge Primary School engage in other innovations to develop oracy and dialogue (for example in weekly LAMDA sessions where instruction by a drama specialist gives a particular emphasis to the physical and social aspects of oracy in order for learners gain real confidence in the use of their body and voice).

Playful Enquiry

There are several strands of evidence which all point towards the importance of play in young children's development, and the value of an extended period of playful learning before the start of formal schooling. These arise from anthropological, psychological, neuroscientific and educational studies. A range of anthropological studies of children's play in extant hunter-gatherer societies (Gray, 2009) and evolutionary psychology studies of play in the young of other mammalian species (Smith, 2006) have identified play as an adaptation strategy which evolved in early human social groups that enabled humans to become powerful learners and problem-solvers. Neuroscientific studies have

supported this view of play as a central mechanism in learning. Pellis & Pellis (2009), for example, have reviewed many studies showing that playful activity leads to synaptic growth, particularly in the frontal cortex, that part of the brain responsible for all the uniquely human higher mental functions. A range of experimental psychology studies has also consistently demonstrated the superior learning and motivation arising from playful as opposed to instructional approaches to learning in children (Sylva *et al.*, 1976; Pellegrino & Gustafson, 2005; Whitebread & Jameson, 2010). Within educational research, a longitudinal study by Marcon (2002) demonstrated that, by the end of their sixth year in school, children whose pre-school model had been academically-directed achieved significantly lower marks in comparison to children who had attended child-initiated, play-based pre-school programmes.

Brought together, these golden threads strengthen our focus on developing children as independent autonomous learners who can self-regulate well; who are articulate, confident and able to express their views respectfully and intelligently; who are curious, creative and playful in ways that deepens knowledge and understanding of the world.

The blue band on our model shows the strategies we use for the values to be understood from a meaningful context: through the use of high quality text-rich learning, domain specific learning (e.g. subject specific as well as opportunities for inter-disciplinary learning (cross curricular, e.g. learning about history through art or science through music) and ensuring that the values are explicitly discussed.

An evolution not a revolution

The Cambridge Primary Review suggested that all primary children should expect a similar National curriculum as well as a curriculum designed in relation to their particular context. We follow these principles and engage with local partners to find ways to enrich our local community curriculum. As the context will evolve, so our curriculum will evolve over time because we want to design learning experiences suited to children's interests, the local dimension and in response to local, National and global issues, opportunities and challenges. Our professional critical reflexivity will form part of our review of the curriculum, in consultation with children and their families.

Practicalities

The themes and topics through which children learn are structured in mixed year groups (Year 1 and 2; 3 and 4; 5 and 6). The themes change biennial (described as A and B). Over the course of different year group phases (Year 1 and 2; 3 and 4; 5 and 6) the National curriculum expectations will be met. The detail of themes and topics are shared on year group BLOGS and can be found in the Learning sections of the website. An overview is presented in the curriculum section.

We are developing ways to assess Habits of Mind, Oracy and Dialogue and Playful Enquiry as part of a wider assessment and evaluation process. These practical resources have not yet been evolved from the research literature; we are excited to work with the Faculty of Education and others in innovating the ways we assess our three golden threads.

Appendix I

What our compassionate citizens would be like – what we would like children to be like when they leave our school

Creative	Open-minded	Reflective
Happy	Tolerant and interested in other	Resilient
Polite and respectful	ways of living and thinking	Community-driven
Kind and supportive	Hard working	Reaching their potential
Independent	Friendship makers	Inspired by the world around
Questioners	Contributors	them
Learning about effort	Mastering concepts	Determined
Excited	Asking for more	Innovative
With good knowledge that can be applied	Self-regulators	Problem solvers
		Solution focused people

Appendix II

Costa & Kallick (2008) provided the dimensions and definitions in the table below. We articulate what this might mean in relation to our Compassionate Citizen core.

Dimension	Definition	Compassionate Citizen link
Value	Choosing to employ a pattern of thinking or intellectual behaviours rather than other, less productive patterns.	Children being able to think flexibly and see problems from different points of view. Empathy being the core.
Inclination	Feeling the tendency to employ a pattern of intellectual behaviours.	Children being able to make well informed and decision free from impulsivity.
Sensitivity	Perceiving opportunities for, and appropriateness of, employing the pattern of behaviours.	Children make well informed decisions, free from impulsivity whilst being sensitive that others around them may think differently.
Capability	Possessing the basic skills and capacities to carry through with the behaviours.	Children being able to communicate clearly, eloquently and respectfully the reasons for their decisions and attempts to solve problems.
Commitment	Constantly striving to reflect on an improve performance of the pattern of intellectual behaviours.	Children are reflective and are aware of how best to improve themselves. Children are keen to strive for better.
Policy	Making it a policy to promote and incorporate the patterns of intellectual behaviours in to actions, decisions, and resolutions of problematic situations.	Children are habitually thinking for the best way to solve problems they face and employ this in a wide variety of contexts which can benefit society.

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