

# **The development of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Amnesia and Déjà Vu**

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Scotland's new *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) has been widely acknowledged as the most significant educational development in a generation, with the potential to transform learning and teaching in Scottish schools. In common with recent developments elsewhere, CfE seeks to re-engage teachers with processes of curriculum development, to place learning at the heart of the curriculum and to change engrained practices of schooling. This article draws upon well-established curriculum theory (notably the work of both Lawrence Stenhouse and A.V. Kelly) to analyse the new curriculum. We argue that by neglecting to take account of such theory, the curricular offering proposed by CfE is subject to a number of significant structural contradictions which may affect the impact that it ultimately exerts on learning and teaching; in effect, by ignoring the lessons of the past, CfE runs the risk of undermining the potential for real change.

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An important element in an adequate evaluation of a curriculum is a philosophical critique. (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 118)

## **Introduction**

Scotland's new *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) is generally viewed as a landmark development in Scottish education, hailed by its architects as 'one of the most ambitious programmes of educational change ever undertaken in Scotland' (Scottish Government, 2008a, p. 8). It signals a serious attempt to provide a coordinated approach to curriculum reform for the full age range 3-18, building on earlier reforms targeted at more restricted stages (*Standard Grade, 5-14, Higher Still*) and taking account of anticipated future needs deriving from economic, technological and social changes. The new curriculum is claimed to be distinctive in that it explicitly moves away from central prescription of curriculum, towards a model that relies upon professional capacity to adapt curriculum guidance to meet the needs of local school communities, drawing upon the arguably successful experience of prior initiatives such as *Assessment is for Learning* (AifL; see, for example, Hallam *et al.*, 2004; Hutchinson & Hayward, 2005). Thus, CfE represents a major national curriculum innovation that has the potential to change the landscape of schooling in Scotland.

The enactment of such a major policy innovation inevitably raises a series of questions relating to its translation from policy ideal to social practice. These

include issues of both methodology (i.e. the mechanisms through which teachers are engaged with the policy) and coherence (i.e. issues of workability that relate to the internal structure of the curriculum). This paper focuses on the latter issue, as we seek to analyse the underlying philosophy of the new curriculum. This analysis is framed against well-established curriculum theory; there is a rich vein of literature in the field of curriculum development, with roots in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (for example, Dewey, 1938; Taba, 1962; Stenhouse, 1975; Kelly, 1986, 1999). It is our belief that recent curriculum developments in Scotland have largely ignored this literature and the theoretical insights that it provides, and that the resultant curriculum is problematic as a result. Indeed much of our analysis draws upon literature from the 1970s and 1980s, perhaps reflecting the manner in which this particular branch of curriculum theory has become a moribund field of study in the UK. In the paper, we track the development of the new curriculum as it has progressively emerged via the publication of a series of key documents, showing how these documents relate to different curriculum planning models. Such analysis addresses fundamental questions of internal coherence within CfE, with consideration of how these might impact on eventual practice. The paper is structured into several parts: first, we provide a brief overview of three archetypal curriculum planning models; second, we discuss the genesis and structure of CfE, in the light of these models; and finally we consider how tensions and contradictions within CfE might play out in practice.

### **Three models for curriculum planning**

According to, A.V. Kelly (1999) when developing a curriculum, it is necessary to acknowledge the particular planning model that underpins it; and in turn this raises an obligation to justify the choice of model and be explicit about underpinning ideology. In Kelly's view, such an approach is necessary to ensure coherence and conceptual clarity about the purposes of education. Kelly offers three archetypal curriculum planning models and suggests that each model is inextricably linked with both underlying purposes and conceptions of knowledge, as well as with eventual methods of pedagogy. Kelly's models are:

1. Curriculum as content and education as transmission.
2. Curriculum as product and education as instrumental.
3. Curriculum as process and education as development.

It is necessary to stress that these models represent starting points for curriculum planning, not mutually exclusive categories; for example, while we are broadly in favour of the process model, we would not argue that content is unnecessary or unimportant, simply that the selection of content is a secondary consideration, to be debated once the broad principles of the curriculum have been established. Moreover, it is not our intention in this paper to undertake a detailed critique of each model, simply to summarise the key features of each and to briefly describe the key criticisms that have been levelled at each.

*Curriculum as content and education as transmission*

The first of Kelly's models takes the selection of content as its starting point. Often such selection simply reflects tradition (the subject has always been taught in such a fashion) or is made for pragmatic reasons (for instance the availability of resources). However, there have been more systematic, intellectually endowed attempts to justify curriculum planning based upon choice of content. These can be broadly categorised as philosophical and cultural variants of the content model.

In the 1960s and 1970s the philosophical work of R. S. Peters and Paul Hirst dominated thinking in the UK about the nature and structure of the curriculum. Peters' *Ethics and Education* (1966) and Hirst's *Knowledge and the Curriculum* (1974) presented a powerful case for a content-based curriculum consisting of forms of knowledge that were regarded as 'intrinsically worthwhile'. This view seemed to provide a justification for a traditional curriculum structured round 'disciplines' or 'subjects'. Being educated, according to this model, required initiation into the various forms of knowledge which each had their own central organising concepts and characteristic methods of investigation that had been developed over time. The historical influence of the Hirst/Peters approach to curriculum can be seen very clearly in Scotland, especially in the Munn Report, *The Structure of the Curriculum in the Third and Fourth Years of the Scottish Secondary School* (SED, 1977). Although this report in its initial rationale considered three sets of claims on the curriculum – social, psychological and epistemological – it was the last of these that exerted the most powerful influence on the recommendations that subsequently emerged. These employed the term 'modes of activity' rather than 'forms of knowledge', but the outcome was a curriculum which was

defined in terms of subject content. Eight modes were proposed: *language and communication; mathematical studies; scientific studies; creative and aesthetic activities; technological activities; social and environmental studies; religious and moral education; physical education*. Arguably this allowed the continuation of subject fiefdoms in Scottish secondary schools, in which teachers saw their principal allegiance to their specialist discipline rather than to any broader conception of the learning process or the personal development of pupils.

An alternative approach to rationalising choice of content derives from a concern to ensure that the curriculum reflects the culture of society. Denis Lawton, who was influential in policy debate in the UK during the 1970s and 1980s (Lawton, 1975, 1989, 1996), has suggested that cultural analysis is the starting point for curriculum planning, rather than the analysis of knowledge. He proposed a five-stage model of curriculum planning: *cultural universals; national culture; cultural analysis; selection from culture; and curriculum objectives*. According to Lawton, it is necessary to sub-divide culture in a way which is manageable yet meaningful; to achieve this he posited a set of nine *cultural invariants* – categories or systems that he claimed are universal to all societies. These are the *socio-political, economic, communications, rationality, technology, morality, belief, aesthetic, and maturation* systems.

At the level of policy, however, selection of content tends to be based upon more mundane considerations. Kelly (1999) has demonstrated that much selection is done for political ends, what he refers to as instrumental selection. Goodson (1995) suggests that content is often proposed in the face of moral

panic about national decline. Goodson and Marsh (1996) have documented the ways in which school subjects evolve through various stages to become unquestioned components of the curriculum – fundamentally a socio-political process of turf wars and struggle over resources. And, as previously mentioned, selection may be made unreflexively as merely a continuation of established practice.

Content driven approaches to curriculum planning have, quite rightly in our view, been criticised on several grounds. There are problems of selection; it is clearly not possible to teach the whole corpus of human knowledge, so selection has to be made. By who? Despite epistemological attempts to define essential knowledge or to select from essential culture, such decisions remain fundamentally political and ideological. For whom? In a multi-cultural society, any attempt to teach from a dominant cultural system will raise questions of alienation and relevance (although to be fair to Lawton (1975), he was opposed to the hegemony of 'high culture'). And it has been well documented for many years (e.g. Pring, 1976) that curricula based upon the selection of content tend to encourage the didactic teaching and passive study of fragmented and decontextualised facts.

### *Curriculum as product and education as instrumental*

A second archetype identified by Kelly is the objectives model. This model has a long and somewhat controversial history, particularly in the USA. It has its roots in scientific management and behaviourist psychology, finding its first expression in education through the work of Bobbitt, and maturing via Tyler's *Rational Curriculum* and Bloom's *Taxonomy* (for a fuller history of

these developments see Stenhouse, 1975; Kelly, 1999). In the UK, objectives were utilised in Schools Council projects (Stenhouse, 1975) and later became a fundamental part of Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET), for example GNVQs, SVQs and their SCOTVEC equivalents (see Jessup, 1991; Hyland, 1994; Wolf, 1995; Raffe, 1994). CBET is arguably a strong behaviourist objectives model, where the curriculum states specific outcomes which are designed for assessment purposes. Weaker versions of the objectives model have emerged in many national curriculum developments around the world, notably the *National Curriculum* in England and Wales (DES, 1989), the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993) and Scotland's 5-14 framework (Scottish Executive, 2000). In many such modern curricula, objectives have come to be sequenced into levels, implying a linear progression through the curriculum; an innovation springing from the *National Curriculum* that, despite a lack of grounding in research (Kelly 1990), has become fashionable worldwide.

Critique of the objectives model has a long history. Many educationists have decried attempts to define the developmental process of education in the form of rigid and predefined objectives. Dewey (1938), for instance, talked of the tendency of objectives to change as you approach them, and Kelly (1989, p. 92) stated that 'to adopt a ..... linear view of teaching and learning, is to have rejected as largely irrelevant the insights offered by studies on child development'. Stenhouse saw objectives-based curricula as being too narrow in focus, too teacher-centred and insufficiently sensitive to the complexities of learning and the dynamics of the classroom. According to



Stenhouse (1975, p. 83), it is 'an ends-means model which sets arbitrary horizons to one's efforts'. Predefinition of objectives is said to deny the validity of the original experience that children bring with them to the classroom, increase the difficulties involved in local curriculum planning, and may assume that the norms of present day society are fixed. By predefining the educational experience, one potentially narrows the curriculum, shutting off possibilities for the sorts of spontaneous learning opportunities, which crop up frequently in all classrooms. Furthermore, such narrowing of learning, especially when objectives are tied to testing and when in turn the results of such tests are used to evaluate schools, has been linked with 'teaching to the test' approaches (e.g. Torrance, 1997). Tennant has identified four basic objections to the adoption of objectives, namely:

that these objectives can rarely be determined in advance; that the emphasis on outcomes undervalues the importance of the learning process; that not all learning outcomes are specifiable in behavioural terms; and that learning may be occurring that is not being measured. (cited by Hyland 1994, p. 32)

Kelly (1999) has noted the tendency for many modern curricula to conflate the content and objectives models, specifying content as objectives. Scotland's former *5-14* framework can certainly be said to fit this model, with broad content being expressed as objectives which then form the basis of assessment decisions about individual students, data being subsequently used to compare schools' performance. Kelly refers to such conflation as the mastery model of curriculum.

### *Curriculum as process and education as development*

A notable advocate of a process model of curriculum was Lawrence Stenhouse, whose book *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development* (Stenhouse, 1975) was highly influential in shaping the thinking of many curriculum projects as well as approaches to teacher education. Stenhouse's advocacy of curriculum as process was influenced by the earlier work of Bruner (1960) and by his experience as Director of the Humanities Curriculum Project. This involved the teaching of controversial human issues 'where teachers could not claim authority on the basis of their subject training' (Stenhouse, 1975, pp. 30-31). The form and direction of enquiry had to be flexible and open-ended, rather than pre-determined, so that the potential for growth and development was maximised, which meant that the outcomes could be unpredictable. Process curricula are based upon intrinsic principles and procedures rather than upon extrinsic objectives. Typically, they are predicated around a view of what an autonomous adult should be and a learning process (often dialogical, inquiry-based and experiential) that may serve as the route to achieving this state. According to Kelly (1999), a process curriculum is fundamentally a curriculum based upon democratic values, comprising a set of structured activities enabling students to practise citizenship, to develop reflexivity and the capacity to question; a curriculum to enable students to 'come into presence' as unique individuals, as powerfully argued by Biesta (2006). Bernstein (cited in Kelly, 1999) identifies three fundamental rights of students that are potentially served by a process curriculum: individual enhancement, inclusion and participation.

The above discussion does not devalue the place of content (or indeed objectives) within a process model. For example, a process curriculum may place a high emphasis on the selection and organisation of content (for example through traditionally recognised subjects). Dewey (1907), regarded by many as a major exponent of a process curriculum, explicitly rejected what he saw as the false dichotomy of knowledge and process, emphasising the importance of the 'accumulated wisdom of the world'. Kelly (1999) likewise acknowledges the importance of content in the curriculum, simply suggesting that there are better starting points for curriculum planning, for example clear attention to educational purposes, principles of inquiry and processes of learning.

Stenhouse acknowledged two important qualifications in relation to the process model. First, much depends on the quality of the teacher:

Any process model rests on teacher judgement rather than on teacher direction. It is far more demanding on teachers and thus far more difficult to implement in practice, but it offers a higher degree of personal and professional development. In particular circumstances it may well prove too demanding. (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 96-97)

This of course raises fundamental issues about teacher agency and especially the ecology within which the teacher works (Priestley, 2009; Biesta & Tedder, 2006), particularly in school environments where teacher development is constrained by assessment regimes and quality assurance mechanisms, including external inspections, and where education has become in many ways an 'impossible practice' (Edwards, 2007, p. 4).

Second, 'the process model of curriculum development raises problems for the assessment of student work' (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 94). There is tension between the desire to assess objectively through formal, public examinations and the informal, critical, developmental learning that Stenhouse advocates. Continuing concern over both of these issues is evident in Scottish curricular documents of the 1980s and 1990s (see, for example, SCCC, 1999), as well as in CfE.

### **Curriculum for Excellence: an overview**

CfE was launched in 2004 with the publication of *A Curriculum for Excellence: The Curriculum Review Group* (Scottish Executive, 2004a). This brief discussion document outlined the key tenets of the new curriculum. There are several significant features of this document which are worthy of exploration. The central ideas of CfE are described in terms of *values*, *purposes* and *principles*. This order is not without significance. Instead of adopting a traditional 'aims and objectives' model of curriculum, CfE starts from a statement of 'the values upon which . . . the curriculum should be based' (p. 8). The words which are inscribed on the mace of the Scottish Parliament - *wisdom, justice, compassion* and *integrity* - are invoked and it is argued that both personal development and social responsibility depend on awareness not only 'of the values on which Scottish society is based' (p. 11) but also of 'diverse cultures and beliefs' (p. 11). In relation to *purposes* – a softer term than either aims or objectives – there is a clear statement of the importance of promoting four key capacities. The curriculum should enable all young people to become:

- successful learners
- confident individuals
- responsible citizens
- effective contributors. (p. 12)

These capacities have quickly become a kind of mantra in Scottish education, regularly cited at conferences and CPD events, and have been subject to little in the way of critical interrogation. For example, how crucial are the particular combinations of adjectives and nouns? Would it make much difference if the capacities were given as effective learners, responsible individuals, successful citizens and confident contributors? *A Curriculum for Excellence* does not offer much in the way of extended justification for either its terminology or its recommendations. In this sense it should be regarded as a broad framework document, designed to form the basis of subsequent policy development, rather than an extended rationale.

Further documentation was slow to follow initially, but the pace has increased subsequently. The publication of *A Curriculum for Excellence* was accompanied by the Ministerial Response (Scottish Executive 2004b), which arguably set out future directions for the new curriculum in a more concrete manner than did the review document. This latter paper established, for instance, that the primary curriculum would be 'decluttered' (p. 3), thereby reducing content, and that the curriculum would be articulated as 'clear statements of the outcomes which each young person should aspire to achieve' (p. 4). Moreover, the response hinted that subjects would continue to be the basis of the curriculum. In 2006, *A Curriculum for Excellence:*

*progress and proposals* (Scottish Executive, 2006a) started to add meat to these curricular bones, in particular emphasising the importance of engagement by teachers, the centrality of learning and teaching and the unification of the curriculum. This document outlined a series of six sequential levels, although it stated clearly that ‘the levels do not imply that there will be testing at specific stages’ (p. 13). *Progress and Proposals* established the principle that ‘expectations will be described in terms of experiences as well as broad significant outcomes’ and that these would be ‘designed to reflect the four capacities’ (p. 12). Significantly, it was proposed at this stage that experiences and outcomes would be structured using the following categories:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Languages
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies
- Expressive Arts
- Technologies
- Religious and Moral Education

Further guidance has emerged more quickly since 2006. This includes *Building the Curriculum 1* (Scottish Executive, 2006b), which provided additional guidance on the eight curricular categories outlined above, and *Building the Curriculum 2* (Scottish Executive, 2007), which fleshed out the early years curriculum. 2007-8 has seen the publication of draft experiences

and outcomes in each of eight curricular areas, followed by a large-scale consultation exercise. According to the preamble,

the experiences and outcomes provide for progression and seek to convey the values, principles and purposes of *Curriculum for Excellence*. They build on the best of existing guidance while introducing areas of change. They are designed to express an approach to learning that is clear to the teacher. (LTS, 2007a)

Significantly, the preamble shows a sensitivity about the dangers of assessment driving the curriculum, as is evident in early documents: ‘the new drafts are **not** [emphasis in original] designed as assessment criteria in their own right’ (*ibid*). However, this is difficult to reconcile with the later statement that:

They should allow for evaluation. In other words, it should be clear from the draft outcome or experience what evidence might be observed to demonstrate progress by the child or young person: evidence of what they can achieve with appropriate pace and challenge, setting higher expectations where there is evidence to support this. (*ibid*)

The format of the experiences and outcomes is worthy of comment, although detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. There has been a deliberate attempt to reduce the number of levels (as compared with the earlier 5-14 framework) and to make the statements less prescriptive than formerly in terms of content. However, there is a definite behaviourist slant to the statements. The earlier *Progress and Proposals* publication had established a template for these statements: ‘experiences and outcomes will

be designed from the learner's point of view, using terms like 'I have ...' for experiences and 'I can ...' for outcomes' (Scottish Executive 2006a, p. 12). The following examples from *Science* and *Literacy and English* give a flavour of these.

*Science*

I can give a presentation to demonstrate my understanding of the importance of the water cycle in nature [SCN203A]. (LTS, 2007b)

*Literacy and English*

I enjoy exploring and discussing word patterns and text structures, and the richness and diversity of the languages of Scotland.

I appreciate the richness of language and texts and the importance they can have in my life [ENG 101A/L/W / ENG 201A/L/W]. (LTS, 2007c)

The use of the first-person in these statements is no doubt intended to give centre-stage to the learner and emphasise the importance of personal engagement, but it does lead to a certain artificiality, when the language employed may not reflect the verbal skills of some pupils. In this sense, the 'subjectivity' of the experiences is misleading, an artifice devised by the planners rather than a true reflection of the learning process.

The draft experiences and outcomes have effectively divided the curriculum into several hundred discrete objectives, spread over 6 levels to cover schooling from 3-18. Work on implementing the curriculum is ongoing. Recent publications include *Building the Curriculum 3* (Scottish Government,



2008a), which seeks to provide a framework for action in schools, and *A consultation on the next generation of national qualifications in Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2008b), which explicitly recognises the effect that national assessment systems may have on the form that the curriculum will take in schools.

### **CfE: what sort of curriculum?**

We next undertake an analysis of CfE, taking as a starting point Kelly's (1999) belief that such analysis is a necessary part of curriculum development, to ensure coherence in structure and conceptual clarity. In this section, we address a number of questions. What sort of curriculum is CfE in relation to the archetypal models outlined earlier? Is it structurally coherent? Is it conceptually clear?

At first glance, the early CfE documentation suggests a process curriculum, although we would not seek to claim that explicit reference to the process model underpinned the thinking of its writers. The four capacities are clearly aspirational statements about the sort of young people that it is hoped will develop from the process of being educated in Scotland's schools. *Building the Curriculum 3* states that:

The child or young person is at the centre of learning provision. The purpose of the curriculum is to enable the child or young person to develop the 'four capacities'. The headings of the four capacities serve well as a memorable statement of purpose for the curriculum, but the indicative descriptions underneath the headings are probably even more important in terms of

understanding the attributes and capabilities which contribute to the capacities. (Scottish Government, 2008a, p. 22)

The headings provide further detail. Thus, for example, a responsible citizen will be able to 'develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it' and to 'understand different beliefs and cultures' and 'make informed choices and decisions' (*ibid*). A successful learner will be able to 'think creatively and independently' and 'learn independently and as part of a group make reasoned evaluations' (*ibid*). The four capacities are therefore easy to construe as intrinsic principles of a process curriculum, articulating in a Deweyan sense a set of purposes of education for individual growth (Kelly, 1986).

However, beyond this promising start, CfE falls down in expressing clear purposes that might underpin a process curriculum. The four capacities do not go beyond a set of general principles. There is little attempt in the curriculum to unpack these further, delving into deeper, underlying purposes of education. In the various CfE documents, there is hardly any mention of the big philosophical and sociological matters which, according to Lawton (1973), are a necessary precursor to planning a curriculum. One view (Biesta, 2009) identifies three broad and overlapping purposes of education: qualification; socialisation; and subjectification (or individual growth). To question the relationship and balance between these is a very valid exercise, but one that is not undertaken within the various CfE documents. To be fair, the four capacities go some way towards articulating a view of education as subjectification, and there are various statements about the role of education

as a driver for future economic success. However, any such analysis tends to be under-developed, resting on assumptions that are taken to be unproblematic.

Instead, the parameters are set by the provisions of the *Education (Scotland) Act* of 2000 which had established five *National Priorities for Education: Achievement and Attainment; Framework for Learning; Inclusion and Equality; Values and Citizenship; and Learning for Life* (Scottish Executive, 2004, p. 6). These were subsequently endorsed by a National Debate on Scottish Education which involved extensive consultation with all the major stakeholders (pupils, teachers, parents, employers, etc). In other words, the policy framework had already been established so it was not thought necessary to go back to first principles. Perhaps another reason for the avoidance of fundamental philosophical and sociological questions was the widely-held belief in Scotland that its cultural values are more democratic and egalitarian than those in England. It has, for example, a small proportion of pupils going to independent schools (less than 5%), no equivalent of selective grammar schools, and a widespread acceptance of the comprehensive system. Explicit discussion of social class factors rarely surfaces in Scottish educational policy documents. Insofar as there is a perceived problem, it is framed in terms of underachievement, poverty of aspiration and low expectations by teachers. In other words, it is construed as an issue to be addressed at an individual and institutional level, rather than at a social/cultural level. Arguably, this can sometimes lead to poor policy decisions. For example, when proposals for the reform of upper secondary education were being considered in the early 1990s, the suggestion that there

might be a 'twin track' for pupils following either an academic or vocational curriculum (SOED, 1992) was rejected on the grounds that it ran counter to Scottish egalitarianism in education. A recent OECD report has challenged Scottish assumptions about the extent to which the self-image of equality of opportunity is justified. It draws attention to the growing divide in educational outcomes of students from different social classes and states that 'Who you are in Scotland is far more important than the school you attend so far as achievement differences on international tests are concerned' (OECD, 2007, p. 15).

Another area where CfE fails to develop its process curriculum credentials lies in relatively undeveloped notions of pedagogy and provision throughout the curriculum; in other words the processes that might form the basis of the experiences of learning within the curriculum. The documents are littered with many generalised references to skills development and active learning. For example *Building the Curriculum 3* (Scottish Government, 2008a) refers to 'skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work' and 'literacy and numeracy and health and well-being' (p. 4). Curriculum areas are stated to be 'not structures for timetabling' and establishments are exhorted to 'think imaginatively about how the experiences and outcomes might be organised and planned for in creative ways which encourage deep, sustained learning and which meet the needs of children and young people' (p. 20). And yet there is little specific detailed guidance on the sort of approaches to teaching, for example cooperative learning or inter-disciplinary timetabling that might be utilised to foster such goals. Cross curricular themes such as 'enterprise,

citizenship, sustainable development, international education and creativity' (p. 23) are identified, but their meanings are not explored in detail or depth.

This latter criticism becomes particularly evident in what CfE says about curriculum *principles*. These are defined rather narrowly in *A Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2004) as 'the design principles which schools, teachers and other educators will use to implement the curriculum' (p. 8), indicating that the focus is to be on operationalising the proposals in the document rather than on any exploration of alternative educational philosophies. The intention is 'to assist teachers and their schools in their practice and as a basis for continuing review, evaluation and improvement' (p. 13). The recommended principles are: *challenge and enjoyment; breadth; progression; depth; personalisation and choice; coherence; and relevance*. The meaning of these somewhat abstract and widely interpretable terms is never thoroughly explored.

Our argument to date is that CfE has at least some elements that would classify it as a process curriculum. There are general statements of purpose, the four capacities, that broadly fit Kelly's (1999) characterisations of individual growth and intrinsic purposes. And indeed, CfE states clearly that content, as expressed through the experiences and outcomes, has been 'written so that ... children and young people have opportunities to develop the attributes and capabilities for the four capacities' (Scottish Government, 2008a, p. 23). Nevertheless, it is our contention that the decision of policymakers to retain a feature of 5-14, namely outcomes organised into sequential levels, has resulted in a curriculum which is incoherent structurally

and which contains epistemological and pragmatic contradictions. This means that CfE is inherently not a process curriculum, but rather a mastery curriculum, an expression of vaguely defined content articulated as objectives. It is our belief that these contradictions will ultimately water down the impact of the new curriculum, meaning that the espoused vision of changes to teaching will be rendered difficult in many schools and that the maintenance of the status quo will be a likely outcome in many cases. We offer a critique of this situation at a number of levels.

Our first criticism concerns the organisation of knowledge into discrete curriculum areas and the selection of content within these. Within a process or developmental model of curriculum, education is arguably a process not an outcome, the end of that process being an educated person who wishes to go on learning (Dewey, 1966). Content should be deliberately selected and organised, therefore from the 'accumulated wisdom of the world' (Dewey, 1907), to meet the demands of the intrinsic purposes, in this case the development of the four capacities. At first glance, CfE appears to eschew the notion of a content-based curriculum. Surprisingly little is said about the content of the curriculum in the early documents (e.g. Scottish Executive, 2004). Reference is made to 'a wide range of planned experiences [which] will include environmental, scientific, technological, historical, social, economic, political, mathematical and linguistic contexts' (p. 13), but these broad headings are not fleshed out in any way. This can be explained by a desire to avoid the charge of being over-prescriptive (such as has been levelled against the National Curriculum in England) and to give teachers more scope to exercise their professional judgement. The subsequent

development of detailed work on specific curricular areas, expressed in terms of the experiences and outcomes, has expanded the specification of content to some extent. Nonetheless, the avoidance of an account of curriculum in terms of content is not without significance and contrasts with earlier approaches to educational reform. Some of the reasons for eschewing an explicit focus on curriculum content can be deduced from the case for change advanced in *A Curriculum for Excellence*. It is, for example, stated that 'we need a curriculum [that should] not be too fragmented or over-crowded with content' (p. 10). Moreover, there is an acknowledgement of the impact of new technologies on the pace of knowledge production and dissemination, and on changing global patterns of employment. The need to go on learning throughout life means that conceptions of curriculum simply in terms of content will be inadequate to prepare young people for life beyond school.

The selection of content within CfE appears to have little clear rationale in this sense; there appears to be an assumption that schools will select content to meet the demands of the experiences and outcomes that that this allows flexibility (although one might cynically posit that it will allow the unreflexive continuation of existing courses in many classrooms). However, despite the lack of specificity in content within CfE, the designation of the eight curricular areas listed above is most certainly in line with a content model of curriculum. These categories are redolent of the Hirstian approach discussed previously. However, while earlier curriculum initiative such as the Munn Report, explicitly drew upon Hirst's model, there is no such attempt to do so in CfE. One is led to suspect that the definition of curriculum areas owes more to an unreflexive continuation of existing practice, and that there is no conscious rationale for

such choices. Indeed the comparison below of the 1904 and 1988 curricula in England with CfE (table one) adds considerable credence to such a view.

***Insert Table 1 - Comparison of content***

We believe that the decision to express content as outcomes, even where specification of content is not detailed, lies in opposition to the developmental thrust of the four capacities. The statements are notable in they combine learning outcomes with experiences, sometimes in a way that could be construed as quite prescriptive, for instance linking, as in the following example from Social Studies, a particular form of inquiry with both a specific type of content and a particular mode of presentation.

Through a case study of a major economic change in the past, I can describe the factors contributing to the change and present my findings about the impact it had on people's lives [SOC305D]. (LTS, 2007d)

It is our view that a curriculum framed as objectives, even when considerable efforts have been made to make the outcomes less prescriptive, will always have the potential to narrow down the educative process, rather than broadening it as implied by the four capacities. The potentially assessment driven–nature of these outcomes may restrict the development of the autonomy, critical thinking etc. that is implied by the four capacities. It is difficult to see how these outcomes will be used differently to those of 5-14 which came to be primarily utilised for assessment purposes; despite the sincere avowals of the curriculum architects that things will be different this time, the basic structures of quality improvement (e.g. local authority use of



statistics and HMIE inspections – see Reeves, 2008) will continue to place pressure on schools via the evaluative use of test data, and this in turn places pressures on schools to teach to the test. Moreover, these outcomes articulate a linear and teleological view of learning and knowledge that is deeply problematic and which works against the concept of education as 'coming into presence' (Biesta, 2006). As Stenhouse (1975, p. 82) stated, 'education as induction into knowledge is successful to the extent that it makes the behavioural outcomes of the students unpredictable'.

It is possible to critique the experiences and outcome more specifically. For example there are multiple instances where progression and/or continuity between levels is haphazard. This may be an issue that is specific to this particular set of outcomes, although we are of the view that it is a fundamental problem with the whole notion of outcomes organised into levels. It is, however, a largely empirical question that is beyond the scope of this paper. The outcomes are also interesting in that they contain many taken for granted cultural and educational assumptions. For example, in the example provided from Literacy and English (above), the notion that students will 'enjoy exploring word patterns and text structures' seems to be very problematic. Other statements make assumptions about values that suggest the inculcation of dominant cultural mores, rather than a genuine process development of values through the interrogation of existing ways of thinking, that may be more appropriate in a democratic, multi-cultural society where values inevitably conflict. Again such questions are beyond the scope of this paper.

What is absent from *A Curriculum for Excellence* invites comment. There is very little sense of the *contested* nature of the curriculum, the fact that it often serves as an arena in which conflicting views of the social function of schooling are expressed. This might be explained in terms of the traditional Scottish approach to educational policy making which is to seek consensus and avoid too much diversity of provision (Humes, 2008). There is also little reference to the historical evolution of the curriculum, the changes of emphasis that have taken place over the years, the relative degrees of central control and scope for local initiative that have been evident at different times. Related to this, there is no mention at all of the insights of research into the curriculum, whether from a philosophical, sociological or psychological standpoint. In fairness, it should be acknowledged that a number of reviews of literature into particular areas of the curriculum were subsequently commissioned, but the parameters for these were set by the original CfE document, the evidential basis for which is not given.

## **Conclusions**

We argue that CfE is an uneasy mixture of the three archetypal models, being essentially a mastery curriculum dressed up in the language of the process model. The issue seems to be a lack of conceptual clarity. The three archetypes co-exist in considerable tension, simultaneously taking a view of knowledge as being something constructed by learners on the one hand and being a prespecified, essentialist body of knowledge to be acquired and tested on the other hand. The operational end of CfE is thus arguably inimical to the underlying purposes of the curriculum as expressed in the four

capacities. There are thus tensions between convergent and divergent modes of learning, between teleological and open ended conceptions of education, which may be unhelpful to the process of enactment in the classroom.

This reflects a general tendency evident in the original reform proposals. The lack of awareness which they exhibit in relation to earlier thinking about curriculum – whether in terms of content, objectives or process – leads to the conclusion that *CfE* is essentially an ahistorical and atheoretical document. Again this might be explained in terms of the Scottish tendency to prefer a pragmatic approach, clearly exemplified in the inspectorate's celebration of 'best practice' as the most appropriate means of effecting improvement. But a reform programme which fails to take account of antecedents, or learn the lessons of the past, runs the risk of promoting innovation without real change.

We conclude by revisiting the wisdom of Lawrence Stenhouse:

Men [*and presumably women!*] are relatively predictable, limited and uncreative. It is the business of education to make us freer and more creative.  
(Stenhouse, 1975, p. 82)

The job of the curriculum is to unlock potential, to enable human beings to 'come into presence' (Biesta, 2006). The early *CfE* documents, with their implicit emphasis on process, offered the potential to break the constraining mould of Scottish education; despite their ahistorical and atheoretical nature, they were aspirational, rooted in a vision of what young people could do and become. We regret that later developments in *CfE* have constrained this aspiration, potentially reducing the freedom and creativity of teachers and

learners, and rendering classrooms predictable, limited and uncreative. This is inevitable given the historical amnesia and lack of theoretical sophistication exhibited by the architects of the curriculum, and we make a plea for future development to be grounded in the rich vein of curriculum theory outlined in this paper.

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**Table 1: Comparison of content**

1904 orders (England)	1988 National Curriculum (England and Wales)	Curriculum for Excellence
English	English	English
Maths	Maths	Maths
Science	Science	Science
History	History	Social Studies
Geography	Geography	Modern Language
Modern Language	Modern Language	Expressive Arts
Drawing	Art	Health & Well-being
PE	PE	Technology
Housewifery/Manual	Technology	Gaelic
	Music	RME/RE
		Cross curricular (Lit/Num)

Adapted from Goodson and Marsh, 1996