Looking forward: A critical analysis of literacy, numeracy and digital competence as cross-curricular responsibilities.

This essay analyses the significance of delivering literacy, numeracy and digital competence as cross-curricular responsibilities in relation to the proposal to implement these essential skills within the Welsh curriculum for 2022 with a particular focus on subject knowledge and assessment (Welsh Government, 2019a; Donaldson, 2015). Although literacy and numeracy have been a Welsh Government's priority for several years, Donaldson (2015) proposes the addition for digital competence as a result of the rise of technology in order to support the learners in the near future. According to the World Economic Forum (2015), each cross-curricular responsibility is one of several fundamental skills required for all individuals to succeed in the workplace in the twenty-first century. Hence, learners should be provided every opportunity to develop these skills with the publication of appropriate frameworks to support practitioners; Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) and Digital Competence Framework (DCF) (Donaldson, 2015; WG, 2019a). In this matter, Donaldson (2015) highlights within his pedagogical principles that these responsibilities will be embedded within all areas of learning of the curriculum through a cross-curricular approach.

Hayes (2010), Barnes (2015; 2018) and Laurine (2015) define cross-curricular learning as the application of skills and knowledge of different subjects in a number of contents. Therefore, this approach to teaching complements the view of Gardner (2011) whereby he states that learners are able to apply their knowledge of a subject within different contents as a result of acquiring a number of intelligences. Providing a holistic approach to teaching that incorporates a number of subjects may consider the interests of the learners (Hayes, 2010; Estyn, 2017b). In turn, this will develop their engagement as learners often find learning easier when it is understood (ibid). Nevertheless, Barnes (2018) and the Welsh Government (2019a) assert that cross-curricular teaching should only be taught appropriately with a requirement for subjects to be taught alone in order to allow learners to develop subject specific skills. Taylor (2015) synthesises with this as she explains that the application of several disciplines within a lesson that develops subject knowledge alone may conflict with the overall learning outcome. Thus, this approach challenges both the traditional view of the curriculum and the role and responsibilities of the practitioner; hence, practitioners require a deeper understanding on the different approaches to teaching which may be challenging (Kerry, 2015).

Practitioners have shown concern regarding the subject knowledge required in order to support the achievement of learners with the introduction of the new curriculum (WG, 2019b). Estyn (2015) suggests that this comes as a result of the employment requirements being greater than the past, therefore, improvements are required as research highlights the underperformance of learners within Wales (Wightwick, 2019; Jones, 2019). Consequently, Oates (2014) advocates that the practitioners'

subject knowledge within all cross-curricular responsibilities is essential in order to ensure that the lessons delivered show progression of skills and knowledge. Yet, Pollard et al. (2019) and Barnes (2015) argue that it will be unfeasible for practitioners to show competence in all aspects of the curriculum. Askew (2012) coincides with this as he suggests that practitioners possess limited subject knowledge and contends that learning is not consistently dependant on teaching. Conversely, research affirms that all practitioners should consider themselves as literate, numerate and digitally competent teachers with the aim to develop the learners' skills throughout the curriculum (WG, 2017; Donaldson, 2015; Didau, 2014). In consequence, Kerry (2015) and the Welsh Government (2019b) acknowledge that acquiring a diverse understanding of the curriculum may be very time consuming. However, Hayes (2010) and Hattie (2012) imply that the impact of the learning is not dependent on the delivery of the curriculum, but the quality of teaching provided.

Estyn (2017a), Davies (2019) and Barnes (2015) state that the application of literacy as a cross-curricular responsibility within schools is the most convenient with literacy being a fundamental skill which enables us to communicate (see appendix one). Therefore, Didau (2014) remarks that the accuracy of practitioners' literacy is important as they are seen as a role model of the language that will be used by the learners in all areas of the curriculum. Statistics imply that several individuals have language difficulties; hence, it is often accounted that individuals depend on the practitioner (ibid.; Gross, 2013). However, practitioners do not often provide every opportunity for literacy to be developed effectively as a consequence of considering the curriculum coverage once completing the lesson plan (Rowley and Cooper, 2009). In consequence, when a cross-curricular approach is applied, it has been observed within Professional Teaching Experience (PTE) that the lesson objectives set by the practitioner do not often reflect what the learners are required to achieve by the end of the session. In addition to literacy, it is often observed that the DCF is not used effectively as learners are provided devices but often do not develop any essential skills from the framework. Hence, Oates (2014), Future Lab (2010) and the Welsh Government (2019a) emphasise that each cross-curricular responsibility should not be forced when embedded within the curriculum but should be used in order to assist the learning. Laurine (2015) grants that having clear learning outcome of what is required by the learners is essential and should not concern the amount of cross-curricular references made within lessons. This complements the views of Didau (2014) and Barnes (2015) who imply that clear learning objectives are required in order to assess the achievement of learners. Effectively, research advocate that a successful delivery of all three cross-curricular responsibilities in different contexts develops the learners' understanding (Pound and Lee, 2015; Donaldson, 2015; Didau, 2014). Practitioners have reduced teaching time towards non-core subjects, therefore, introducing such approach will ensure that these subjects are taught alongside developing the three cross-curricular responsibilities (Estyn, 2016).

Furthermore, subject knowledge of the practitioner is essential in relation to literacy and numeracy as Rowley and Cooper (2009) argue that the attainment of learners is very broad in this area of the curriculum. In turn, the Welsh Government (2019a) and Pollard et al.(2019) suggest that practitioners' subject knowledge is require in order to consider these aspects during planning and elect an appropriate method of teaching. Mohyuddin and Usman (2016) acknowledge this in numeracy and assert that practitioners are required to identify appropriate teaching strategies that prevent misconceptions. Research conducted by CAMAU (2018) and Hansen (2011) coincide with this and advocate that practitioners are required to address and avoid viable misconceptions that arise in order to ensure that this does not interfere with the assessment process. Yet, Taylor (2015) and Spooner (2002, cited in Hansen, 2011, p.13) identify that providing opportunities for misconceptions will allow learners to develop their understanding on numeracy. To put differently, having the ability to determine when learners have understood a task is paramount in comparison to pedagogical and subject knowledge. Hattie (2012; 2009, cited in Pollard et al., 2019, p.288) emphasises that there is no correlation between the practitioners' acquiring specialised subject knowledge and the attainment of learners. However, both Barnes (2015) and Askew (2012) reinforce that the practitioners' subject knowledge is required in order to teach aspects of the curriculum that is unfamiliar to them and allow them to overcome any challenges that they encounter. Therefore, Shulman (1986, cited in Pollard et al., 2019, p.288) underlines that practitioners require a variety of knowledge to tech effectively; subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and curriculum knowledge. For this reason, Boaler (2009, cited in Pound and Lee, 2015. p.45) emphasises that practitioners do not often integrate numeracy within other subjects as a consequence of the application of rules and the absence of confidence shown by the practitioner. As identified during PTE, incorporating numeracy within lessons has been found difficult when applied to learning associated with the theme of 'Tudors' but complemented the learning that took place during the thematical lesson of 'seasons.' Hence, Pound and Lee (2015) suggest that the application of numeracy within different subjects becomes meaningful.

Additionally, Pocket Media (2018) suggests that practitioners require subject knowledge in digital competence as technology is no longer considered as a motivating tool within education, but one in which is significant. However, the delivery of the current DCF within schools has not been understood, resulting in practitioners dismissing the use of this cross-curricular responsibility within the curriculum (Future Lab, 2010; Estyn, 2018). Having sufficient subject knowledge of digital competence is fundemental as technology is present and learners are required to be taught and guided by the adults around them (Barnes, 2015; Jics, 2019). Implementing this cross-curricular responsibility within different aspects of the curriculum will enrich their learning by enabling learners to receive learning from environments beyond the classroom (Pocket Media, 2018; Cisco, 2019). Future Lab (2010) acknowledges the opportunities of the use of digital competence as digital competence can develop the learners' creativity and curiosity. This complements the view of TED (2007) who suggest that creativity

is equally as important as literacy in the curriculum with the opportunity for learners to deliver an element of risk. Yet, McVeigh and Walsh (2000) and Palmer (2006) suggest that the use of technology within the curriculum inhibit our intelligences, our social skills and increases risk to our health. Despite this, Donaldson (2015) highlights within his four curricular purposes that the curriculum should provide these essential skills for the futures of our young people, emphasising that the use of digital competence is influential.

On the contrary, research imply that the current curriculum does not provide sufficient skills for learners to become successful in the era of the technology (Jics, 2019; Goldman Sachs, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2015; Jones, 2019). Askew (2012) and Kerry (2015) acknowledge this and suggest that a curriculum prevents the potential skills that learners can bring to the curriculum with a requirement for learners to develop certain skills. Subsequently, for the purpose of the practitioners, the curriculum should reflect the skills required as Estyn (2018) asserts that the publication of the DCF will be outdated by six years alongside the new curriculum. Therefore, the government is required to develop a curriculum which reflects the future as technology is developing rapidly (Jics, 2019; Davies, 2019). However, the Qualified Teaching Status (QTS) note that it is mandatory for practitioners to assign responsibility to govern the achievement of others for all aspects of the curriculum and should therefore develop their skills, knowledge and understanding on all three cross-curricular responsibilities (WG, 2018; Didau, 2014; Turvey et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the development of digital competence skills within learners is not dependent on the skills and knowledge of the practitioner alone. Turvey et al. (2016), Caldwell and Bird (2015) and Davies (2019) identify that the concerns of delivering a cross-curricular lesson that incorporates digital competence are often linked with the resources required. During PTE, it has been identified that schools contrast in the number of resources available to learners. In school A, the school acquired enough devices one between two per class with school B acquiring ten devices for the whole school. For this reason, within high resourced settings, learners are provided the opportunity to use these devices independently and will contently develop and maintain higher levels of skills in contrast to low resourced settings (Turvey et al., 2016; Davies, 2019).

Moreover, Donaldson (2015) highlights that the introduction of a new curriculum will encompass simpler assessment procedures with a particular focus of assessment for learning. Assessments has an integral role in education as it allows practitioners to recognise and support learners by identifying the learners' strengths and areas for improvement (WG, 2019b; Turvey, et al. 2016). Effectively, Kerry (2015) notifies that the use of a cross-curricular approach can allow practitioners to identify different skills that go beyond the curriculum. Therefore, assessment should be the focal point of education with the ability for practitioners to have a clear progression to learning (Barnes, 2015; CAMAU, 2018; Black and William, 1998; Hattie, 2012). Conversely, the application of three-cross curricular responsibilities within the new curriculum will require practitioners to have accurate judgements to learning which may

be difficult (CAMAU, 2018). In this matter, Barnes (2015) connotes that cross-curricular approach to teaching becomes more challenging to assess in comparison to one subject. However, Smith and Huntly (2015) and Davies (2019) underline that the use of the LNF allows practitioners to differentiate tasks and provides guidance for future learning. This has been identified as a difficult aspect in the DCF as the adverbs used in the framework does not show clear progression steps required for the learners to achieve (CAMAU, 2018; Davies, 2019). Turvey et al. (2016) argues that assessment is often required during the process which is beyond the bound of possibility as it has been observed in schools as a consequence of one class teacher. Likewise, Potter (2012, cited in Turvey et al., 2016, p.36) reinforces that the development in technology questions the assessment of digital competence as the skills required advance. Nevertheless, Barnes (2018) underlines that such approach to the new curriculum will allow practitioners to assess learners' understanding as he suggests that learners are required to apply knowledge in different contents. Nonetheless, Hattie (2012) implies that practitioners do not consider the consequences of their practice until they have gathered evidence of the effect of their teaching. Thus, teachers should evaluate the learners' current understanding of the three cross-curricular responsibilities in order to be excellent practitioners (ibid.).

Williams (2018) enforces that the Welsh education system requires a coherent assessment system in order to improve the attainment of young people. Unlike digital competence, it has been identified that learners are expected to undertake assessments for reading and numeracy (Lewis, 2018). The Welsh Government (2019a) and Williams (2018) affirm that the proposal of these tests will enable practitioners to evaluate their own practices with a view to separate national testing and assessment for learning. Barnes (2018) concurs with such view as he articulates that assessment should not be measured but used to evaluate the support required for learners to improve their academic performances. Despite the changes to the publication of results, parents highlight their concerns with the belief that schools are putting too much pressure on learners to succeed (Wightwick, 2019; Programme for International Student Assessment, 2015 cited in Barnes, 2018, p.130). For this reason, the new assessments require adaptability in order to match the learners' challenge and skills which in turn strengthens the information provided to the practitioners (Wightwick, 2019). As recognised within PTE, practitioners often prioritise literacy and numeracy above other areas of the curriculum in order to ensure adequate results shown by the learners. In this matter, learners do not develop further skills of the curriculum for a duration of a week and compare results when published (Williams, 2018). Conversely, using these tests termly has had positive effects to reduce the learners' anxiety and a method to identify the progress of learners which has been observed during PTE (WG, 2018). On the other hand, Donaldson (2015) asserts that assessments should be implemented sparsely which complements the views of Black et al. (2011, cited in CAMAU, 2018, p.24) who remark that assessment for learning heightens the attainment of learners in contrast to national testing.

To conclude, despite the opportunities of delivering a cross-curricular approach to teaching acknowledged in this essay, practitioners speculate that the combination of different aspects of the curriculum will reduce their abilities to teach effectively (WG, 2019b). I and a number of teachers lack the knowledge and confidence to deliver of all three cross-curricular responsibilities which is a factor which has affected the underachievement of learners within Wales (Jones, 2019). Therefore, providing training to support the upskilling of teachers that complement the era will be of benefit to allow practitioners to achieve appropriate QTS (ibid; Davies, 2019). For this reason, I as a practitioner suggest that practitioners should conduct an audit in order to identity their learning needs in order to plan and support the development of all three cross-curricular responsibilities. Jones (2019), Estyn (2016) and Davies (2019) connotes with this as it has been suggested that practitioners are often unaware of which skills they are or not competent on teaching learners within the classroom. As identified within schools, practitioners lack competence in the skills required beyond the Foundation Phase (Estyn, 2018). For this reason, I and a number of practitioners often teach their strongest subjects over those that they are less confident to teach. Donaldson (2015) identifies this area of weakness as he suggests that the Welsh curriculum requires a new assessment strategy for both learners and the practitioner. In other words, adaptations to the curriculum are required in order to successfully implement these responsibilities within schools.

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Appendix One - Interview Conducted with a Practitioner

1. **What opportunities do you think the three cross-curricular responsibilities bring to the current curriculum?**

This approach to teaching and learning allows assessment opportunities. Furthermore, this is a creative approach to teaching and learning which increases the motivation and engagement of the learners as it allows the practitioner to deliver lessons that is of interests of the learners within the classroom. Thematic lessons have developed engagement of learners who are often distracted or have a short concentration span which emphasises the previous point discussed. Lastly, this approach allows practitioners to develop a range of skills from the curriculum as the current curriculum requires practitioners to develop a broad range of skills of the learners which can be very time consuming when taught separately.

2. **What challenges do you think that the three cross-curricular responsibility to the current curriculum?**

I believe that the challenges to deliver a cross-curricular approach is the increase of the workload required when planning for upcoming lessons. Furthermore, there is a challenge of the lack of ICT equipment in some schools and connection problems might be faced when delivering lesson. Likewise, many practitioners do not have the competence and confidence to develop the skills of the learners taken from the DCF framework. This is as a result of the rapid change in technology and is often difficult to keep up with the skills required to deliver to learners. I believe that practitioners of older generation find this aspect of the curriculum very difficult as unlike the learners within the school, these individuals did not have the opportunity to use such equipment when they were younger.

3. **How do you think we can overcome these challenges?**

Practitioners can overcome the challenges of a cross-curricular approach by ensuring that we implement thematical lessons to cover multiple skills at once. Schools should also plan which reflect the amount of resources they have at the school. In addition, the Welsh Government should consider increasing funding received by schools to ensure that schools have appropriate resource and equipment to deliver the curriculum. Lastly, to ensure continuity of skills delivered practitioners, it would be of benefit to bring back precious audits done for digital competence and use this effectively to allow practitioners to develop their skills confidently.

4. **Do you think the current LNF and DCF framework allows practitioners to assess the work of the learners accurately? Please state why.**

Yes, above all, literacy is an essential skill and is therefore the most skill embedded within the curriculum with a natural link to all areas of the curriculum. The LNF framework allows practitioners

to assess the learners effectively as this is easily differentiated and allows practitioners to evaluate where the learners are currently performing. To add, we as a school hold LNF tests termly in order to assess the progression of the learners in the class in order to evaluate our own practice as practitioners. However, the DCF does not. The current framework is very broad and does not allow practitioners to provide specific levelling. Also, it is found that learners often show skills vital skills of this era which have not been considered within the curriculum. This shows that the curriculum requires development in order to consider essential skills required for the era of technology.

5. **Will you be confident implementing these cross-curricular responsibilities during your planning? Please state why.**

Yes, as a year one teacher, I am confident in implementing these cross-curricular responsibilities within my planning and have the competence in all responsibilities in order to do so effectively. As a result of sufficient training provided by the school and building blocks, this has development my confidence on the delivery of all cross-curricular responsibilities with the digital competence skill being my strongest. However, with this said, literacy can be applied to a number of AOLE's within the curriculum as this is a vital aspect to the learning as we require the use of oracy, reading and writing every day.