

## UNIT 4.1

# INVESTIGATING THE AIMS, VALUES AND PURPOSES OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

## The case of the Cambridge Primary Review

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### INTRODUCTION

If I were in a classroom today, I wouldn't run it too differently from the way I ran it all those years ago [20 years]. I'd want it to be a stimulating place, filled with colour and interest. I'd want my pupils to enjoy coming to school. I'd want them to interact positively and sensitively, and to feel what they were doing was worthwhile. And I'd want every child to feel the excitement of acquiring knowledge and fulfilling whatever potential they have.

(Kent, 2006: 65)

These are the words of Mike Kent, a London head teacher with more than 40 years' experience. As you re-read his words, reflect on whether what he proposes is what you recognise to be the kind of learning experience you hope for for the children in your future classes. Is what he proposes what you envisage to be synonymous with the aims, values and purpose of primary education as a whole?

### OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will:

- be introduced to some key moments from the last two centuries of primary education;
- become aware that political, social, economic and cultural factors are always at play in any education system;
- consider and reflect on the aims, values and purpose of primary education;
- learn about the aims and principles underpinning the Cambridge Primary Review;
- be encouraged to define your own pedagogical approach for primary teaching and learning.

This unit starts by outlining a snapshot of some key moments in the history of primary education over the last 150 years, in order to illustrate how philosophical and practical questions about the

purpose of the primary school and education have long been the subject of debate. It is beyond the remit of this unit to offer a full timeline of education policy and practices, but the unit will signpost you to a useful Internet source that explores the development of education, starting in the seventh century up to the present day (<http://bit.ly/2qbWLaq>). The unit will use one case, that of the Cambridge Primary Review (CPR), to outline ways in which schools tackle the big questions about the purpose of primary education and how the choices schools make are reflected in practice. The remainder of the unit offers the reader an overview of the CPR's main aims and objectives, before looking at the legacy of the work.

### In Wales . . .

We know that school effectiveness requires an ethos where children and young people are expected to succeed and achieve a personal standard of excellence. The ethos needs to reflect the values inherent in Wales, including the importance of the Welsh language within the context of a bilingual country with its unique culture and traditions. It needs to provide the right support to ensure all children and young people have equal opportunities to succeed.

(DCELLS, 2008: 8)

Source: Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS). (2008) *School Effectiveness Framework: Building Effective Communities Together*, Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government. Retrieved from <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/091020frameworken.pdf> (accessed 25 October 2017).

## A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: THE GREAT EDUCATION DEBATES

The 1870 Elementary Education Act was committed to providing education on a national and 'mass' scale. Prior to the Act, there had been educational provision for some children in some areas in the form of voluntary schools, provided by churches or charities. It was later in 1876, and as an outcome of the Royal Commission on the Factory Acts, that the recommendation was made to make education compulsory in an attempt to halt child labour. At the end of the nineteenth century, education became compulsory for all children up until the age of 13, including those with additional needs. A restricted curriculum was on offer, focused on the 3 Rs: reading, writing and arithmetic, and in later years these core subjects were joined by additional subjects such as geography, history, grammar and needlework (for girls). As is ever the case with primary education, it was the findings of two Royal Commissions (1881 and 1884) on technical education that had the indirect effect of influencing and enriching elementary (or primary) education (Gillard, 2011).

In terms of the 'system' of schooling, prior to 1870, the role of infant schools was to separate what Matthew Arnold (a school inspector at the time) referred to as the 'babies' to prevent them distracting from the important job of teaching the older children. However, it was the Huxley Committee of 1871 (see Gillard, 2011) that stressed that infant schools also had a role, not only in protecting children from outside (and corrupting) influences, but also in providing foundational experiences to support children's later learning in the advanced schools.

Politicians have been concerned with curriculum since the time of the Elementary Education Act of 1870 (Gillard, 2011), when discussion and debate moved away from the early concerns of school buildings, teachers and resources. Before this time, the 'what' of what to teach was not the main

consideration; interestingly, it was another 100 years before the 'way' in which children learn became the subject of political debate and disagreement. The early focus of nineteenth-century education was on preparing children for employment, and, in some areas, the turn of the twentieth century saw the establishment of 'day trade schools', which prepared (mainly) boys for entry into furniture- or cabinet-making. And, as is ever the case with education, you may notice echoes in the implementation of the modern-day apprenticeship schemes for 16+ pupils, as the school leaving age in England rose to 18 as a result of government policy in 2015.

There has always been a debate about what school is for; in those early days, it was about ensuring the next generation was ready for work, with the discussion shifting in the early twentieth century to consideration of how the aims and values of schools might mirror those of society. The 1931 Hadow Report suggested that, 'A good school . . . is not a place of compulsory instruction, but a community of old and young, engaged in learning by co-operative experiment' (Hadow, 1931: xvii). Later, the Plowden Report (CACE, 1967) posited that, 'all schools reflect the views of society, or of some section of society, about the way children should be brought up, whether or not these views are consciously held or defined' (p. 185). As you enter the teaching profession, you may wonder what the current education system says about the society we currently live in, or indeed the one we are preparing children for. For example, you may have heard mention of Year 5 pupils being prepared for jobs that as yet don't exist; there is no actual evidence that this is the case, especially as many of the jobs for young adults have existed for centuries - the healthcare profession, catering, jobs involving technology, and so on - but what is true is that the ways in which these jobs are carried out are changing.

What then is the role of school, the curriculum or the type of teacher you are, in ensuring that the children you come into contact with throughout your career will be prepared for the future challenges ahead? Maybe you disagree that the role of the primary school is to prepare children for employment, and at interview for your teaching course you may even have been asked, 'What is the purpose of primary education?' If your answer had been that it was to prepare children for secondary school, you wouldn't be reading this book now, as to have been accepted for your primary education course, you evidently recognised that primary schools have a special and different role in the education of young children. However, it is no surprise that some people can view primary education in quite simplified terms. It is not uncommon in political discourse or debate for 'education' to be used as a proxy for *secondary* education, which is where some consider that 'real' learning happens. For example, if you review any of the suggested initiatives by a previous education secretary, Michael Gove (2010-14), whether focused on changing school structures through academisation, or on overhauling traditional university-based teacher training through the introduction of 'on the job training', these initiatives have their origins in the secondary sector, with subsequent 'lite' versions abridged for the primary school.

Schools, both primary and secondary, are complex systems; learning and teaching are complex in the nature of their interdependence, and children are complex because they are different - they think differently, interpret your interpretation of policy differently and come to any learning experience with experience of prior learning, which the very best of teachers take account of and incorporate within their teaching approaches.

This unit argues that one of the unique features of primary education is the nature of the relationship between the teacher and learner. Although it is true that all teachers should focus on 'enabling children to learn' (Cullingford, 1997: 2), it is the teacher-pupil relationship within the primary setting that allows the teacher to take on the role of guide and to nurture the children in their charge. In the 1990s, Cullingford (1997) attributed the distinctive ethos of British primary schools to the teachers' role in supporting the social and emotional well-being of the children in their classes. Fast-forward 20 years,

and teachers still take on this role, despite an ever-changing curriculum and the many political footballs played out in the media. In addition to the type of teacher-pupil relationship you begin to establish in school, the other unique feature of primary education, which you will begin to notice, is that schools and teachers, depending on the school context, can still exert autonomy (despite external pressures) over what they teach through the ways in which they interpret the statutory curriculum. The decisions that a school staff chooses to make will be due, in part, to what the school understands as to the purpose of primary education, which you are most likely to notice through how the school vision is communicated. Gammage (1996) challenges us to consider that 'Schooling and education are, of course, not necessarily synonymous' (p. 144). What he argues is that education should be viewed as a lifelong process where, through the experience of learning, we find out about ourselves and others and we learn how to negotiate our way in the world. On the other hand, schooling is a relatively short and systematic, compulsory process.



### **Task 4.1.1 Personal reflection on your own primary education experience**

What was it that made your primary school experience different to what you may have experienced when you turned 11 and went up to 'big' school?

To help you reflect on how your primary experience was framed, spend some time browsing through Derek Gillard's excellent repository of documents, including education Acts, White Papers, reports and other key events (<http://bit.ly/2qbWLaG>). The website provides a useful timeline of education since the seventh century.

As you read through the website, reflect on your own experience of primary school, with the policy/papers/Education Acts of the day, and compare your reflections with those of your peers. If you were educated in a different country, compare your experience with those of your UK counterparts to see what was the same/what was different.

You may find out, if you attended primary schools in the UK in the 1980s, that your education was framed partly by policies introduced by education secretaries, including Margaret Thatcher and Kenneth Baker; it was during this decade that the current INSET days were first introduced and called Baker Days (after Kenneth Baker). Or, you may remember, as a direct result of the 1988 Education Reform Act (HMSO, 1988), your teacher struggling with the ten A4 folders that heralded the introduction of the first National Curriculum for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Or, if you're in your twenties, you will no doubt remember the curriculum being influenced by the national strategies for literacy and numeracy (DfEE, 1998), and in particular you may have hazy memories of the 'literacy hour clock' dominating your literacy learning.

Unit 4.2, Aims into practice: Understanding schools' aims and enacting your own, will explore how schools develop a curriculum, and Unit 4.3, Critical perspectives on the curriculum, will discuss current statutory curricula in more depth.

For the remainder of this unit, we will present just one way in which increasing numbers of schools have chosen to interpret and supplement their curricula, and that is by using the Cambridge Primary Review (CPR) to reflect their aims, purposes and values of primary education more broadly.

## WHERE ARE WE NOW? THE CURRENT CONTEXT

The political culture within which modern English primary schooling is set remains in some respects as it was a century ago - deeply paternalistic, utilitarian and suspicious of change from within.

(Alexander, 2000: 128)

So, where does this leave primary education in the twenty-first century - where is the middle ground that keeps children and their learning at the heart, learning that is facilitated and taught by teachers grounded in subject knowledge and a definable pedagogy?

## DEVELOPING A PRINCIPLED PEDAGOGY

### In Northern Ireland . . .

The aim of the Northern Ireland Curriculum is to 'empower young people to develop their potential and to make informed and responsible choices and decisions throughout their lives' (CCEA, 2007: 4). The learning opportunities provided through the Northern Ireland Curriculum should help young people to develop as an individual, as a contributor to society, and as a contributor to the economy and the environment. Underpinning this is the aim to build desirable attitudes and dispositions, such as moral character, community spirit, tolerance, flexibility, self-belief, pragmatism, concern for others, personal responsibility and curiosity.

Source: Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). (2007) *The Northern Ireland Curriculum: Primary*, Belfast: CCEA Publications. Retrieved from [http://ccea.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/curriculum/area\\_of\\_learning/fs\\_northern\\_ireland\\_curriculum\\_primary.pdf](http://ccea.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/curriculum/area_of_learning/fs_northern_ireland_curriculum_primary.pdf) (accessed 25 October 2017).

Offering time to reflect on the pedagogical practices used within a school and within our classrooms may seem like a luxury considering the number of day-to-day processes, pressures and practicalities teachers and school leaders need to balance. With this in mind, it is understandable that finding space to examine the pedagogy employed in a school through triangulating practice, research and progress can, in some cases, be overtaken by the day-to-day routines within a school, possibly resulting in what Alexander (2010a) notes as the reduction of education to focus on skill acquisition. However, finding this space within the crowded life of the school community is paramount to developing teacher professionalism and teacher pedagogy. Indeed, Devine *et al.* (2010) remind us that, 'teacher professionalism emerges from teachers' capacity to cite evidence and pedagogical principles in the pursuit of teaching goals' (p. 816), therefore enabling the teacher to develop a principled approach to their teaching repertoire.

An increasing number of schools and centres of education have sought to carve out space for examining pedagogy through setting up their own continuing professional development (CPD) programmes, with the aim of developing practice. In some cases, these are developed internally and specifically respond to the needs of the school as identified by the senior leadership team. Other establishments have looked for external support and partnered with universities or subject associations such as the United Kingdom Literacy Association, the Mathematical Association and the Geographical Association in order to provide breadth, balance and challenge (see Units 9.2 and 9.3).

One organisation that has been highly influential in supporting the development of a principled pedagogy is the Cambridge Primary Review Trust (CPRT), which was formed following the culmination of the work from its predecessor, the CPR. One practical influence of the work of the CPRT has been the development of school-based reading forums. These forums offer colleagues time and space to debate, interact, discuss and ponder on their own practice, framed around the key priority areas resulting from the CPR.

## THE CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW

Published in 2010, as a result of 6 years of work, including more than 1,000 submissions, twenty-eight specially commissioned reviews, more than 3,000 published sources of evidence reviewed, and 237 meetings at regional and national level, the CPR was 'a comprehensive and independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England' (Alexander, 2010a: 1), with the final report and research companion referencing more than 4,000 sources drawing on the work of thirteen contributing authors (Moss, 2010). The final report raised critical questions regarding the underlying philosophy and direction of primary education in England (Devine *et al.*, 2010) and sought to highlight an education that emphasised the importance, relevance and need for equity and empathy, challenge and relevancy, as well as exploration and freedom. Significantly, the Review focused on a number of salient questions, asking:

What is primary education for? To what needs and purposes should it be chiefly directed over the coming decades? What core values and principles should it uphold and advance? Taking account of the country and the world in which our children are growing up, to what individual, social, cultural, economic and other circumstances and needs should it principally attend?

(Alexander, 2010a: 174)

Supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the final report was significant, as it was the first major scrutiny and systematic analysis of primary education for more than 30 years, since the Plowden enquiry from 1963-7. The report identified four phases of political interaction with education that took place in the intervening years, which Drummond (2010) outlined as the 'unchallenged' phase from 1967-76, the 'challenged' phase, which spanned 1967-87, the 'regulated' phase from 1987 to 1997 and then the 'dominated' phase, starting in 1997 and arguably continuing beyond 2016. The publication of the Review took place subsequent to the commissioning and publication of the government's own review of primary education in the form of the Rose Review (DCSF, 2009). This review had a more limited scope than that of the Cambridge Primary Review and did not challenge policy, pedagogy and practice in the same way or to the extent that Alexander (2010a) was able to do. Indeed, it was reported that the proposals identified in the Rose review 'would not run against the grain of existing policy' (Campbell, 2011: 344). In 2009, the commissioning government adopted the Rose proposals, but they were later abandoned in May 2010 by the incoming coalition government.

It was soon evident that the driving force of the coalition education reforms (2010-15), under the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, would be less far reaching than the principled pedagogy identified within the CPR. And, as the review had no political affiliation, in that it was an independent review of primary education, it became increasingly clear that the curriculum would remain centrally controlled. However, 7 years on, and three Secretaries of State for Education later, the principles and aims of the CPR remain as relevant and active as ever. Indeed, many schools have continued to adopt the aims and use them to shape or define their own approach to teaching and learning, reflected in the way they describe the curriculum and pedagogy of their school.

## CPR AIMS AND PURPOSE FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION

Underpinning the review were three broad perspectives, ten themes and twelve aims for primary education in England. Chapter 12 of the final report ('What is primary education for?') highlighted the challenges involved in defining educational aims, which were borne out through the responses to the Review (evidence was gathered from parents, teachers, children, community leaders, international research and across a range of professional and third-sector organisations). The specific key questions were as follows:

- What is primary education for?
- To what needs and purposes should it be chiefly directed over the coming decades?
- What core values and principles should it uphold and advance?
- Taking account of the country and the world in which our children are growing up, to what individual, social, cultural, economic and other circumstances and needs should it principally attend?

In addition, at the core of the Review are three broad perspectives that provided the framework for the subsequent themes and questions. The perspectives, as outlined by Alexander *et al.* (2010), concerned 'children, the world in which they are growing up, and the education which mediates that world and prepares them for it' (Alexander *et al.*, 2010: 4) and can be summarised as:

- children and childhood;
- culture, society and the global context;
- primary education today and tomorrow.

The third perspective, which is concerned with primary education itself, was further subdivided into ten broad themes, which in turn have a set of questions each relating to the value, purpose, process, content and quality in England's primary schools. For a detailed overview of the themes and the subsequent questions, see <http://cprtrust.org.uk/cpr/full-themes/>

The twelve aims for primary education, the focus of this unit, are organised into three groups, which are reflected in the principles and the title of the final report, *Children, Their World, Their Education*: namely, the individual; self, others and the wider world; and learning, knowing and doing. A key priority for the CPRT was to encourage schools to adopt and pursue these aims, and, in order for them to do so, the aims should be acted upon as they 'will stand or fall by what teachers do with them' (Drummond, 2010: 12), and, if they fall, 'we shall be left the current dissonance of high ideas and expedient practice' (Alexander, 2010a: 262). The aims, organised into the three groups, are outlined below, but can also be found together with further explanation at: [http://cprtrust.org.uk/about\\_cprrt/aims/](http://cprtrust.org.uk/about_cprrt/aims/)

### *The individual*

- Well-being;
- engagement in learning;
- empowerment of pupils;
- autonomy and sense of self.

### *Self, others and the wider world*

- Encouraging respect and reciprocity;
- promoting interdependence and sustainability;

- empowering local, national and global citizenship;
- celebrating culture and community.

### ***Learning, knowing and doing***

- Exploring, knowing, understanding and making sense;
- fostering skill;
- exciting the imagination;
- enacting dialogue.

Some notable critics (in addition to government officials) of the CPR were author and researcher Mary Jane Drummond (2010) and Emeritus Professor of Education R.J. Campbell (2011), with the latter describing the Review as 'backward-looking, cumbersome and partial' (p. 26). Such was the consternation that the Review was critiqued in such a way, other academics, including Michael Armstrong, wrote published articles in response (Armstrong, 2011). Apart from criticisms regarding areas considered partially covered, such as gifted and talented pupils, the private sector and the range of collected evidence (Campbell, 2011), it was also noted that the complexity of the principles, questions, themes and aims, together with the various subsidiary elements, could cause confusion and be impractical for teachers on a daily basis. It is certainly true that, as a new-to-teaching student, you may well be wondering why there is so much emphasis in this book on a Review that seemingly fell on deaf ears, and whose aims and priorities appear not to be reflected in current curriculum or policy documentation. However, what remains true of the Review and why it should matter to you as a trainee teacher is that, to be a successful teacher, you need to understand why you teach what you teach, how children learn from what you teach them, and from what and where your own values are derived.

One of the legacies of the CPRT is the access to the research reports and briefings that were commissioned to update and extend those originally published by the CPR. These reports, unrivalled for their educational evidence, vision and principle, are available to view on the CRPT website (<http://cpitrust.org.uk/>) and will also be available as a mainstay on the Chartered College of Teaching 'knowledge platform', available at [www.collegeofteaching.org/](http://www.collegeofteaching.org/)

We would encourage you to have a look at some of the reports and reflect on how your own practice reflects the research. You may even want to set up a group within your school or university to share the findings from the reports and look at influencing and possibly shifting your own pedagogy through the research findings.

## **SHIFTING PEDAGOGY THROUGH POLICY**

In many ways, teachers have been required to be flexible across the vast swathes of initiatives that have punctuated primary education during the last 30 years, all of which have arguably shifted pedagogical approaches adopted in the classroom. Such initiatives have included the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998) and the National Numeracy Strategy (DfEE, 1999), which were soon followed by the National Strategies (DfES, 2006). The strategies were implemented as short-term initiatives in a 'systematic attempt at a national level to drive improvements in standards through a focused programme of managing changes in the way that core subjects are taught in classrooms' (DfE, 2011: 4). It seems clear that there was a focused attempt to shift the pedagogy within the classroom to ensure that:

Once a teacher has adopted the right approach - the system's pedagogical values - and has learned to manifest these in effective teaching practice, they become an invaluable asset to the school

(Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber, 2010: 78)

It is interesting to reflect on the different approaches highlighted so far. The CPR calls for a pedagogy of repertoire, whereas it could be argued that the influence of recent policies and practices has led to a pedagogy of recipe and delivery. However, given the diverse nature of schools and the number of still-principled school leaders who focus on the development of the whole child, the profession has become adept at weathering changes.



From what you have read so far about the findings of the CPR and the possible pedagogical shifts in primary education, you could use the questions below to consider your own classroom practice and the influences on it. Make a subjective mark on each scale following the question. This will give you an indication of your current pedagogy.

4 Is your class curriculum original and distinct from other classes?

<—————>

5 Do you encourage play and exploration in open-ended contexts?

<—————>

6 Do you develop children's opportunities and capacity for possibility thinking?

<—————>

7 Do you afford the children time and space in their learning?

<—————>

8 Is there a learning space developed in your classroom where teachers and children develop and learn together?

<—————>

From the results above, consider forming two aims with relation to your own pedagogy. You may, for example, consider the question of curiosity and plan ways in which your classroom curriculum might better foster children's curiosity.

You may also be conscious of the need for children to have a sense of completion in their work and want to plan opportunities for children to revisit work they feel most connected with, in order for them to mould and shape it before finally presenting it.

## THE AIMS OF THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM AND THE ROLE OF THE IMAGINATION

To highlight one of the many tensions in primary education, this next section considers how one of the twelve aims of CPR, 'exciting the imagination', can be fostered and become central to your classroom practice. Previously, recognition has been given to the place of creativity in the curriculum, with Sir Ken Robinson defining it as 'the process of having original ideas that have value' (Robinson, 2006), but less attention has been given to the role of the imagination, of both teachers and children. In the comprehensive *Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination* (edited by Kind, 2016), many authors note how fixing upon a definition has perplexed many researchers and academics, leading to the American philosopher Noel Carroll defining imagination as, 'the junkyard of the mind' (Kind, 2016: 1).

Alphen (2011) defines imagination as:

a heightened form of cognition, capable of transforming the knowledge and skills to be learned into enhanced experiences. These experiences stimulate creativity in thinking and involve the emotions of the learners, through which a more meaningful relationship is established with the learning material.

(p. 16)

It is easy to see how this concept supports the aims and purposes of the CPR, with its focus on the development, not only of skill acquisition, but on the identity of the individual child in their individual context. The Cambridge Primary Review encourages teachers and children to develop critical and imaginative thinking, in what Egan (2005) argues is 'the ability to think of things as possible - the source of flexibility and originality in human thinking' (p. 220). So how might a philosophy of imagination fit within the primary curriculum?

## THE QUESTION OF AN IMAGINATIVE APPROACH TO THE CURRICULUM

The seminal text *Imagination* by Mary Warnock explores the tension between the aims of a primary curriculum that is overly concerned with the Standards agenda and the place of imagination. Warnock (1976) states that, 'I have also come very strongly to believe that it is the cultivation of imagination which should be the chief aim of education' (p. 9). However, the journey to imaginative learning is not straightforward or without its struggles; indeed, the detail of this central CPR aim highlights the 'pains' of imagining, while also stating that, 'entering into the imaginative worlds of others, is to become a more rounded and capable person' (Alexander, 2016: 5).

Warnock was writing almost 50 years ago, but the debates are just as prevalent today. An imaginative approach to the primary curriculum offers the opportunity for children and teachers to think freely and develop a *space for learning* within a class where contributions from the whole class community are encouraged to develop understanding, knowledge and skills. McKernan (2008) notes:

by allowing students the opportunity to think freely for themselves we shed our being in authority and give this as a right to the student. This is what is emancipatory about education; it frees the student from the *patria potestas*, or the parental jurisdiction.

(p. 23)

This freedom of thought can be difficult: we are no longer talking about elements of lessons and of learning that can be easily measured and assessed; instead, teaching and learning become a collaborative act, with teachers and children interacting together and creating learning in a shared space. Learning becomes real; it is happening in the present, and children and teachers can feel it.

In the case study below, Claire Williams, a Year 4 teacher at Saint Andrew's Church of England Primary School, discusses her approach to primary education and exemplifies, through her practice, how she prioritises the values of the CPR in order to provide a rich, broad, balanced and imaginative curriculum for her children.

### CASE STUDY: YEAR 4 TEACHER

*Position in school:* Year 4 Class Teacher, Reading Coordinator, Outdoor Learning Coordinator, Forest School Leader and Mentor

*Number of years teaching:* 4

*Route into teaching:* Primary PGCE, University of Cambridge

*What do you think the aims of primary education are?*

In line with the core aims of the Cambridge Primary Review, I believe that primary education should have intrinsic value in itself rather than being seen solely as preparation for the future. A balance needs to be secured between attending to children's future fulfilment and to their needs and well-being in the here and now. A successful primary education should foster children's development as self-motivated, resilient learners, instil a lifelong love of learning and empower them with a sense of agency, autonomy and optimism for the future.

*What do you consider to be your priorities as a teacher?*

My priorities as a teacher give life to my values and view of the aims of primary education. As primary school teachers, we have a unique opportunity to influence children's learning dispositions and identities. Nurturing children's intrinsic motivation to learn and belief in themselves as learners is at the heart of my pedagogy, which is shaped by a commitment to the learning capacity of every child;

all children should have a positive view of what they can achieve and feel that their voice is valued. For example, committing time and space to finding out about individual children's reading preferences and home reading practices, through activities such as 'Rivers of Reading', enables me to develop reciprocal, interactive reader-to-reader relationships with the children and foster positive reading identities. By developing a dialogic pedagogy and listening to their perspectives, I hope to promote children's active engagement and foster their growth as autonomous learners. I strive to enable enjoyment, fun and laughter and, ultimately, nurture their happiness and well-being.

*In what ways are your priorities evidenced in your practice?*

These priorities are reflected in my classroom practice, which is principled and evidence-informed. By building positive, collaborative relationships with the children, I am able to make professional judgements to develop a broad, rich curriculum that balances policy requirements with their interests and needs. The 'Wonder Wall' in our classroom allows the children to share 'I wonder . . .'s and questions inspired by their learning, which then inform my planning, and as part of our creative, topic-based curriculum, the children choose and lead a topic for half a term. This year's child-led 'Cracking Contraptions' topic, which the children decided on collaboratively because they wanted to learn more about inventions and inventors, took a few 'uneggs-pected' yet 'eggs-citing' turns when one child highlighted the relevance of the picturebook *Egg Drop* by Mini Grey; this resulted in an 'Egg Drop Challenge' from Mini Grey herself and thirty-five unsuspecting eggs being parachuted from the school roof! Teaching creatively and for creativity across the curriculum excites the children's imagination and sparks their curiosity, which, in turn, fosters an enjoyment of learning.

I work hard to create a positive, safe classroom climate; together, we rise to challenges, take risks and celebrate each other's successes. As a way of encouraging the children to look for and recognise the positive in others, the display in our classroom that shows our school learning behaviours is interactive. When they 'see the sparkle' in another child, the children write them a star-shaped post-it note to stick on the display, recognising and sharing this; it could be anything from winning a cross country competition after putting in the hours of practice to showing resilience when faced with a challenge in maths.

Giving a high profile to a dialogic view of teaching, collaborative group work is a key part of my pedagogic repertoire. Collectively, we construct ground rules for high-quality discussion, which helps the children to engage in productive 'exploratory' talk. Opportunities to work collaboratively, think and reason together in this way are built in regularly; for example, at the beginning of a new teaching sequence in English, I plan in opportunities for the children to talk in groups about their reading of new texts, using Aidan Chambers' *Tell Me* approach.

As a reflective teacher, I am committed to continued and principled professional development, actively seeking out opportunities to use evidence to reflect on and improve my practice.

Claire responded to the following three key questions:

- 1 What do you think the aims of primary education are?
- 2 What do you consider to be your priorities as a teacher?
- 3 In what ways are your priorities evidenced in your practice?

These are three questions that you may wish to reflect on and to consider in the light of Claire's responses. Do you agree with her assertions about what good primary practice looks like? Are your experiences of primary education, either as a trainee or pupil, mirrored in Claire's reflections?

## SUMMARY

As you reflect on this unit, consider what you have learned about some key moments in the history of primary education and how economic and social factors are always at play within any education system, and consider how your own ideas about the aims of primary education will be evidenced through your own day-to-day practice in the classroom. In the next unit, the authors will urge you to take the baton that is being handed to you and take things a step further by becoming a teacher with purpose, passion and empowerment.



## ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

Cowley, S. (2017) *The Artful Educator: Creative, Imaginative and Innovative Approaches to Teaching*, Carmarthen, UK: Crown House.

A familiar author for student teachers, in this easy-to-read book, Cowley likens teaching to art and teachers to artists, musicians and dancers. If you are looking to be more playful and creative in your teaching, the book's examples of practice provide a useful starting point.

Pollard, A., Black-Hawkins, K. and Cliff-Hodges, G. (2014) *Reflective Teaching in Schools*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

As director of the UK's Teaching and Learning Research Programme, Andrew Pollard, with contributors from the University of Cambridge, puts forward a range of examples of reflective teaching from diverse settings, underpinned by research and theory. It is easily accessible and useful for thinking more broadly about the principles and concepts that contribute to teacher expertise.

Taylor, K. and Woolley, R. (2013) *Values and Vision in Primary Education*, Oxford, UK: Open University Press.

A practical book, easily accessible and with useful ideas student teachers can immediately put into practice. Key themes include curiosity, creativity and problem-solving, all of which are underpinned by sections covering the broader principles of values and vision.



## FURTHER READING TO SUPPORT M-LEVEL STUDY

Cox, S. (2011) *New Perspectives in Primary Education: Meaning and Purpose in Learning and Teaching*, Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

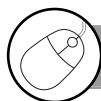
In this excellent book, Sue Cox explores the changing landscape of primary education and tackles the perceived tension that exists between teachers as professionals and policy and procedures that, it could be argued, in some cases cause a shift in pedagogy within the classroom. Sue Cox revisits the meaning and purpose of learning and teaching and invites the reader to possibly reposition themselves as a result of reading the book and reflecting on their own practice.

Lefstein, A. and Snell, J. (2013) *Better than Best Practice: Developing Teaching and Learning through Dialogue*, London: Routledge.

This book sets out to challenge current teaching approaches and to expose the meaning behind the phrase 'best practice'. Instead, the authors ask us to explore a pedagogy that is 'better than best practice' through highlighting the tensions that exist within any classroom and recognising the constant decision-making taking place, by both teachers and children. Using a range of case study material through a companion website, readers are able to view teachers as they develop learning in their classrooms through focusing on the dialogue taking place.

Alexander, R. (2000) *Culture and Pedagogy*, Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

An extensive review of primary education across international borders, this combines policy discussion with offering fine-level thinking on schools and classrooms. Engaging with this seminal text, winner of the Outstanding Book Award (2002, AERA), will provide a firm understanding of the thinking behind the work of Robin Alexander and the CPRT.



## RELEVANT WEBSITES

Cambridge Primary Review Trust: [http://cprtrust.org.uk/about\\_cpirt/aims/](http://cprtrust.org.uk/about_cpirt/aims/)

A most comprehensive site outlining the principles, priorities and mission of the Cambridge Primary Review Trust.

Research Rich Pedagogies: <https://researchrichpedagogies.org/>

A new website highlighting excellence in research showcasing projects from the Open University that offer inspiring and creative pedagogies. The website offers all teachers the opportunity to upload case studies from their own practice that highlight how children and young people are encouraged to explore their own ideas, use their imaginations and engage creatively.

Chartered College of Teaching: [www.collegeofteaching.org/](http://www.collegeofteaching.org/)

The college aims to create a knowledge-based community where good-practice examples can be shared, and it hopes to offer a collective voice for the profession. It invites you to join as a member, and for students what may be of most interest is the link to evidence-based research and the proposed 'pathway to professional development'.



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