

What is the purpose of a curriculum?

By Ed Vainker

So for schools I think a curriculum allows them to sequence and organize the knowledge that they want pupils to develop, and the skills they want people to develop over their time in the school, so it would include clarifying the order in which that should happen and also the content itself so what it is they want pupils to learn and what skills they want pupils to develop and to what level.

For teachers a curriculum allows, allows them to be clear about the knowledge and the ordering and the sequencing with which they want pupils to acquire that knowledge and the way that they're going to demonstrate the particular skills of that subject and it helps them to prioritise because within a subject there's so much that can be taught but to prioritise what each people needs and to make sure that they're building on what pupils have learned in the past.

As someone who's kind of studied the subject at university or at A level we, you've, developed a picture, a kind of a schema, a way of organizing your knowledge of that subject and so when you learn something new you learn it in the context of other things that you've previously learned and that's what we're trying to help pupils to do while they're at school, to build these schema these pictures of a subject in their heads and a curriculum is what helps children to develop that schema and helps them to organise their learning and so that they can see how the way the Shang dynasty fell is connected to the fall of the Roman empire and then when an empire gets particularly big it becomes harder to keep it kind of under control and that ability to organize knowledge and to organize ideas is what pupils I think can get from a well-planned curriculum.

So a high-quality curriculum has been carefully thought about and it's been carefully designed to be rigorous so it's challenging and it asks pupils to develop really complex and challenging ideas and then importantly it's been really carefully sequenced and so the ordering of how pupils will learn and what they will learn at different times has been thought about and there are connections made across time and space so that a year three curriculum builds on what pupils will have learnt in year two and ensures that that is growing their schema and their picture of the subject.