

How well does a cross curricular Humanities Scheme of Work reflect the four purposes of the new Wales Curriculum 2022?

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Introduction

In 2015, Graham Donaldson published a report to the Welsh government, reviewing the current curriculum and proposing changes (Donaldson, 2015). In this, Donaldson looked at the main purposes for a curriculum, the structure, pedagogy, assessment and then the recommendations that might be implemented. The four purposes of the curriculum are to ensure that:

“All our children and young people will be:

1. ambitious, capable learners who ...are ready to learn throughout their lives
2. enterprising, creative contributors who ... are ready to play a full part in life and work
3. ethical, informed citizens who ... are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world
4. healthy, confident individuals who ... are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.” (Donaldson, 2015:29-30).

The current aim of the new curriculum is to prepare learners for life in and out of school; the New Curriculum is expected to be in place for year 7 in September 2023 and year 8 in September 2024. In order to do this the school in which I teach has split the curriculum into 6 AOLEs (Areas of Learning Experience) including Humanities where I am based as a leader of Religious Education. The school has interpreted this new curriculum as a way to introduce more cross curricular links, not just with other subjects in the Humanities AOLE but also the other AOLEs across the school such as English or Health and Wellbeing. It is for this reason that I opted to do an action-based research study which trialled different methodologies and

pedagogies to aim to create a cross curricular scheme of work. This was my dissertation contributing to a master's degree at Warwick University.

Two other major components of the new curriculum are pedagogy and assessment. The pedagogy I utilised in the study incorporates cross curricular links. This was not only using links throughout the Humanities (history, geography, sociology, and psychology) but also English and Maths. This incorporates strategies used throughout the school in various AOLES as well as the school's priorities such as increasing the literacy opportunities in Humanities. The other component, assessment, took the form of both formative and summative. Formative assessment took place throughout the Scheme of Work (SOW) and at the end of the series of lessons. There was a summative assessment in the form of a humanities project which ties together the cross curricular links which is true to the new curriculum as well as bolster the learners' knowledge and skills set. This takes places as an extended piece of writing looking at how does belief affect action with reference to historical events and their effect on geography.

My study involved creating and trialling a new SOW, using cross curricular links based upon the life of Martin Luther King Jnr. The purpose is to show his faith in action and how that has affected people of faith today, using the Black Lives Matters movement as one of the examples. I used the book "Free at Last: The Story of Martin Luther King (Faith in Action Series)" (Owen, 1997) as a basis of guided reading by the year group and created activities including history, geography, and numeracy skills, which finally wrapped up in an extended written piece. These disciplines were brought together in a multitude of ways, such as linking segregation laws in the US maps to where slavery was last seen in the US. This shows how belief is reflecting in actions, not in individuals, but also in societal norms and values. The emphasis on literacy and the guided reading is one of the AOLES priorities for this academic year.

Research Questions and Methodology

My research questions were:

- What do learners understand about the new Wales Curriculum 2022 and cross curricular links? (They already know about the new curriculum to some extent as they have trialled several projects previously.)
- How can an integrated humanities scheme of work be developed to reflect the four core purposes of the Wales Curriculum 2022?
- How appropriate is the integrated humanities approach created in the scheme of work in enabling learners to make links between different curriculum areas and appreciate the value of making links?
- How effective is the integrated humanities scheme of work in achieving the four core purposes of the Wales Curriculum 2022?
- What can be learned from the study about the future development of an integrated humanities scheme of work which reflects the four core purposes of the Wales Curriculum 2022?

Methodology and Key Findings

This research was an action research study with a specific year 8 group comprised of different ability levels and a fairly even gender split. All students were given a questionnaire at the beginning of the research to identify what they know about the new Wales Curriculum 2022 and cross curriculum links as well as their views and opinions on them. The questionnaire used a range of open and closed questions. The results from the questionnaires acted as a baseline to identify possible strategies to adopt and trial during the teaching of the scheme of work. A second questionnaire was issued at the end of the unit to see how the learners perceive cross curricular links and the new curriculum.

As a way of monitoring, I did not just rely on learners' questionnaires but also my research diary as well as evaluating learner responses. Keeping a research diary helped me reflect on my work as it happened but also giving me a tool to look back on at the end of the series of lessons. I also had a focus group of 6 learners I interviewed before and after the project.

All answers in the questionnaire and focus groups are anonymised by a number tag or a pseudonym.

Data

Questionnaire results

These answers follow the Likert scale of 1 being the lowest (not at all) and 5 being the highest (very well). These scores are averaged marks out of 5.

Question	Before (/5)	After (/5)
Do you think you are taught to be ethical and informed citizens?	3.62	3.71
Do you think you are taught to be ambitious and capable learners?	3.67	3.68
Do you think you are taught to be enterprising and creative contributors?	2.95	3.25
Do you think you are taught to be healthy and confident individuals?	3.64	3.95

Focus Group

The focus group was conducted between the first two questionnaires. I selected learners who represented the dynamics and demographics of the class, e.g., pupils in receipt of free school meals, girls/boys, etc.

The first question I asked the focus group was “Do you think the four core purposes are a good idea to form a curriculum around?” The theme that came from the analysis of responses was it starts to form a well-rounded curriculum but needs extra skills added.

Ted: And creative yeah. Like why it’s good to like think about it. Also, to like think about things as well. Such as, well, just like this, you know, enjoying yourself. Like going to socialize.

Lucy: Not really 'cause I think what Ted said. I completely agree with what he said 'cause everything that. Not everything goes towards things that we need

to know. But you know, if you wanted to know something specifically like a feature or whatever it's nice to know them anyways.

This shows that they understand why the four purposes are important in the curriculum and that they see what the purposes are covered in lessons implicitly even though it is not usually named as such. But they also show that there are elements lacking such as communication skills; as Ted says, learning to socialize is important.

Question two was “Has the SOW made you think more differently about what ‘Humanities’ is?”. The theme that came from the responses was learning about new skills and subjects.

Boris: Like other skills such as sociology and psychology and history as well.

Susan: Because we saw how in this event, we know how religion is incorporated and so we’re not just looking straight at that religion we're looking at. How it's been incorporated into different things.

The responses demonstrate that the SOW has shown that there is more to humanities than geography, history, and RE. The introduction of sociology and psychology skills and topics to illustrate the story of Martin Luther King Jnr has given more depth and breadth to the SOW.

Question number three was “Do you think the SOW hits the four purposes?”. The theme from this response was how the purpose was implicit in the work rather than explicit.

Ted: Yeah, but nobody normally thinks about it like that really, it just kind of does and nobody really realizes it.

This has a similar theme to question one, where the purposes are being covered but without there being an explicit mention of the four purposes.

The fourth question the learners were asked was “Do you see the cross curricular links? Does it help with your understanding?”. The theme for this response was how the cross curricular links helped with the consolidation of knowledge.

Ted: Yeah, learning about all the cross curricular themes. Like you don’t really think about think about how it affects other things and it's just kind of there, but you don’t really appreciate it or think about it that much.

Lucy: It helped that you looked at an aspect of a historical event and then added everything in. Going through the story.

The learners felt that the extra cross-curricular links that were made more explicit helped them develop their thinking and learning; as Lucy said, focusing on one aspect from one

discipline or subject then building other knowledge from other subjects/disciplines in or around it.

The last question was “Any other comments?”. This gave the learners an open question to answer in any way they felt appropriate. This meant that they could mention something they thought or felt even if they did not think it was directly related to the study. The theme that came out of the study was developing different knowledge and skills in the project.

Jamal: I think I enjoyed seeing the protests.

Lucy: I think I enjoyed seeing different side not sides now 'cause we've learned about racism before, but we've never learned about Martin Luther King. It's it was nice to see that's not nice racism, but it's nice to see another like story of it 'cause before we just learned about the bus stop one. Rosa Parks and that was the only one we learned about.

Susan: I liked reading about the book and the whole story and putting it into practice.

Boris: I liked when we did the storyboard when we summarized the whole story in our own words.

The learners felt that they were able to understand the different facets of the topic, looking through different lenses (RE, sociological, psychology, history, and geography) that they were able to fully benefit from the SOW in its entirety. This meant that they could evaluate the whole scenario rather than just examine the religious aspect. The themes were remarkably similar and intertwined. The learners all had similar experiences and attitudes to the SOW.

Discussion

During my study, the answer to question one changed. To begin with, learners were not familiar with the terminology such as four purposes and they did not have the knowledge of what constitutes the subjects from the Humanities AOLE. As we introduced more meaningful links with history, geography, and the Social Sciences, the learners began to understand “how they organise knowledge and understanding and how they operate as subjects” (Harris, Harrison *et al*, 2012: 6), therefore making a cohesive curriculum where all the parts are interlinked.

For the second question Gatley (2020) struggled to see how the four purposes and AOLEs of the structure of the curriculum would achieve the overall purpose of the new curriculum, whereas I have found that the four purposes are a good way to guide the new curriculum as they suggested the skills and values learners need to progress, but not necessarily the knowledge needed to. This then links to the AOLEs as it is then up to the subject specialists in those areas to decide what knowledge and disciplinary links are also needed to gain secure knowledge across the AOLE.

The SOW was effective in tackling the four purposes as shown in the earlier findings section as the four purposes are reflected in the 'What Matters' statements that govern the Humanities curriculum. The 'What Matters' statements, "Events and human experiences are complex, and are perceived, interpreted, and represented in different ways" and "Enquiry, exploration and investigation inspire curiosity about the world, its past, present and future" and "Human societies are complex and diverse, and shaped by human actions and beliefs", were all achieved in this SOW. There are five What Matters statements meaning that this SOW was able to achieve 60% of them. The suggestions from Harris, Harrison et al (2012) and Fook and Gardner (2007) of creating and storing substantive knowledge, and there being three separate SOW in each of the three years of KS3, means that should the same planning and involvement occur in all these nine SOWs just in the RE department, then that has gone a significant way towards developing the new curriculum in the Humanities AOLE. If this also happens in both the history and geography departments (Social Sciences is not taught in KS3), then the learners in KS3 in School X have a very secure, cohesive knowledge and understanding, leaving them well placed for studying GCSE subjects.

To answer the last question of the sub questions, we can learn a lot from this cross-curricular study. One thing that was done effectively and should be built on is the use of literacy to embed knowledge. As Quigley (2020) suggests there is a need to cultivate learners' reading by offering learners the opportunities to read and implementing clear reading in each of our SOWs, then we are able to improve the literacy of the learners. This also returns to Willingham's idea (2009) that learners' brains connect to a story better than to an abstract idea presented to them. This shows that using a story or event to hinge the knowledge and understanding on is more successful in consolidation of knowledge and understanding by making it more tangible. With this link alone, the Humanities AOLE have a constant link with

the Languages, Literacy and Communication AOLE in some way. There are six AOLEs in the curriculum, including Humanities. That could mean that each of the SOWs in KS3 could have an explicit link to at least one of the other AOLEs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

So, on balance, a cross curricular humanities scheme of work can reflect the four purposes of the new Wales Curriculum 2022 well, but it needs all stakeholders to be adequately involved in the process of creating the SOW as well as evaluating it as it takes place. It is with sufficient time given to planning across disciplines and AOLEs and adequate management, that the cross curricular links with disciplinary skills and knowledge can be created. This would mean that there is a rich, cohesive, and meaningful curriculum in place across the school that benefits the learners significantly and prepare them for the future outside of school. This shows that RVE fits appropriately into a cross curricular project and is very versatile to link across subjects and AOLEs. For me, it is important to show that RVE can be included in a meaningful way rather than being shoe horned in or used as a filler.

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Appendix

Research Diary

Date	Lesson Title	Attendance (/24)	Key points	Analysis and conclusions
11/01/22	Segregation	24	Introductions to Martin Luther King Jnr and the idea of segregation.	There were varied answers to the starter about Martin Luther King Jnr, from not hearing the speech before to knowing significant events in his life. Anecdotally, one learner did not know he was assassinated. This shows the importance of using a narrative to fix the knowledge to. This is similar to the thoughts of Willingham with the idea of 'brain privileges stories' (Willingham, 2009).
25/01/22	Success and Suffering	24	Bus Boycott and freedom riders was taught, 80% completed homework assigned last lesson. Used Bible passages to see where Martin Luther King Jnr gained his beliefs as a Baptist minister.	Four learners and the learner who was absent last lesson had not completed the homework assigned the previous lesson. They were sat by learners who had completed the work to ease the cognitive load for this lesson as explained by Nuttall (Nuttall, 2007; Arnold in Hutton and Cox, 2021). The use of Bible passages is to reinforce the above idea of 'brain privileges stories' (Willingham, 2009; Unstad and Fjørtoft, 2021).
08/02/22	Experiment on Authority	23	Milgram's experiment - It took over ten minutes for someone to question my actions, staff, and learner alike.	One of the threshold concepts in the SoW involved the psychological theory of obedience (Meyer & Land, 2006) which was necessary for this lesson. The experiment on obedience (Milgram, 1963) was the main crux of this lesson. Using a social sciences lens (Hutton and Cox, 2021) gave the learners the ability to investigate whether the experiment, if carried out again today, would have the same outcome. The starter demonstrated that.
01/03/22	I have a Dream	24	All but one had heard the speech "I have a dream" before the lesson.	Looking at the speech in the context of when it was made supported the story and the events that led up to it. This links to the literature on reading and stories presented by Willingham and Unstad and Fjørtoft (Willingham, 2009; Unstad and Fjørtoft, 2021). It also demonstrates the fourth What Matters statement "Informed, self-aware citizens engage with the challenges and opportunities that face humanity and are able to take considered and ethical action".
15/03/22	Free at Last	23	Cartographical skills of United States of America Summarising the life of Martin Luther King Jnr	The learners made substantial links between segregation laws, slavery laws as well as the protests from Martin Luther King Jnr's era and the BLM protests today. It used different lenses and disciplines to analyse different forms of media and information (Unstad and Fjørtoft, 2021; Hutton and Cox, 2021). Using the humanities as the anchor point made the individual aspects one coherent understanding such as the integration between the different subjects in humanities raised by Harris, Harrison <i>et al.</i> (Harris, Harrison <i>et al.</i> , 2012).
29/03/22	How did Martin Luther King turn his belief into action?	24	Key task- How did Martin Luther King turn his belief into action?	By using the story of Martin Luther King Jnr, the learners were able to make strong coherent links between belief and action. They were also able to show links between Bible passages and Martin Luther King Jnr's beliefs story and literacy are used as examples in Willingham, (2009, Unstad and Fjørtoft, 2021, and Hutton and Cox, 2021).