

A NEW ERA FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION? BUILDING ON THE CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW

Robin Alexander
University of Cambridge

CPR Network North East Regional Centre
Inaugural conference at Newcastle University

8 March 2011

REMIT OF THE CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW

- 1 With respect to public provision in England, the Cambridge Primary Review will seek to identify the purposes which primary education should serve, the values which it should espouse, the curriculum and learning environment which it should provide, and the conditions which are necessary in order both that these are of the highest and most consistent quality possible, and that they address the needs of children and society over the coming decades.*
- 2 The Review will pay close regard to evidence from research, inspection and other sources on the character and adequacy of current provision in respect of the above, on the prospects for recent initiatives, and on other available options. It will seek the advice of expert advisers and witnesses, and it will invite submissions from a wide range of interested agencies and individuals, both statutory and non-statutory.*
- 3 The Review will publish both interim findings and a final report. The latter will combine evidence, analysis and conclusions together with recommendations for both national policy and the work of schools and other relevant agencies.*

THE SCOPE OF THE CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW: THEMES AND EVIDENCE

EVIDENTIAL STRANDS

Submissions

Soundings

Surveys

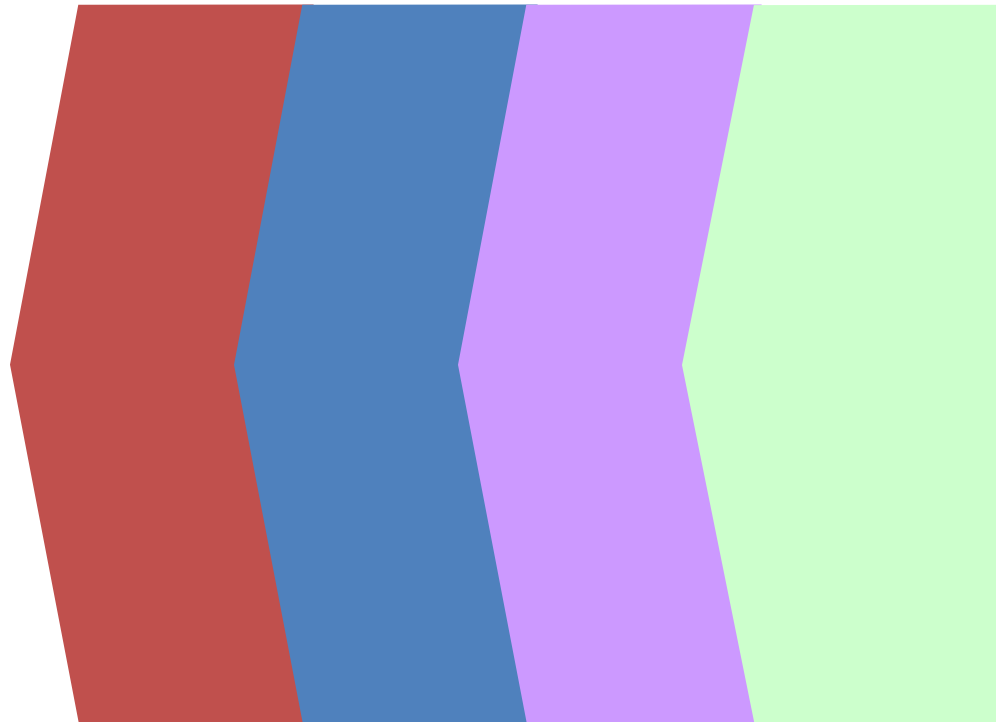
Searches

PERSPECTIVES:

- Children
- Society
- Education

THEMES:

- Purposes & values
- Learning & teaching
- Curriculum & assessment
- Quality & standards
- Diversity & inclusion
- Settings & professionals
- Parenting, caring & educating
- Beyond the school
- Structures & phases
- Funding & governance





Children, their World, their Education

Final report and recommendations of
the Cambridge Primary Review



‘The Cambridge Primary Review is for the longer term, not the next election... and it is not just for the transient architects and agents of policy. It is for all who invest daily, deeply and for life in this vital phase of education, especially children, parents and teachers.’

THE FINAL REPORT: 78 CONCLUSIONS, 75 RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall picture (1-3)

Children and childhood (4-21)

Narrowing the equity and attainment gaps (6-8)

Children with special needs (18, 21)

Home and school (7-8, 14)

Ages and stages: early years and primary education (22-31)

What is primary education for? Aims, values and principles (32-37)

What should children learn? The curriculum (38-53)

How should children learn and be taught? Pedagogy (54-61)

Assessment and testing (62-74)

Quality, standards and accountability (40, 47, 53, 75–85, 150)

Teachers: education, training and development (119–23, 128–31)

Teachers: professional roles, expertise and deployment (118–9, 124–8, 132-3)

Teachers: leadership for learning (134-42)

Schools for the community, schools and other agencies, schools for the future (86-117)

Funding, governance and policy (143-153)

AFTER THE CPR FINAL REPORT: POST-ELECTION PRIORITIES FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION

1. Accelerate the drive to narrow England's overlapping gaps in wealth, wellbeing and attainment.
2. Make children's agency and voice a reality.
3. Consolidate the EYFS and extend it to age 6.
4. Clarify what primary education is for and make aims drive rather than embellish the curriculum.
5. Replace curriculum tinkering by curriculum reform; secure entitlement to a balanced foundation for lifelong learning.
6. Reform assessment, redefine standards: ditch the dogma that there is no alternative to SATs.
7. Replace pedagogy of official recipe by repertoire, evidence and principle.
8. Replace the TDA professional standards for teachers.
9. Review primary school staffing: ensure that schools have expertise for entitlement.
10. Help schools to work in partnership, as communities, in communities.
11. Reverse tide of centralisation; re-think relationship between government, LAs and schools

CPR POLICY PRIORITIES FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION: GOVERNMENT ACTION SO FAR

Priority	Action
Narrow the gap	<i>£7 billion 'fairness premium' announced.</i>
Children's agency and voice	
Consolidate and extend EYFS <i>olds.</i>	<i>EYFS review in progress; fairness premium extends pre-school provision to disadvantaged two-year olds.</i>
Aims of primary education	
Curriculum reform	<i>Rose dropped, end of QCDA, new NC review under way.</i>
Reform assessment	<i>Review of KS2 assessment in progress.</i>
Pedagogy	<i>End of PNS; less prescription promised.</i>
Replace TDA professional standards	<i>In-house review of standards in progress; TDA to go.</i>
Primary curriculum capacity review	<i>Review announced and under way.</i>
Schools, partnership and community	<i>Localism encouraged, but academies / free schools?</i>
Reverse centralisation	<i>Less centralisation promised; quangos axed.</i>

THE AIMS OF THE CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW NETWORK

The network aims to encourage, support and celebrate practice that:

- *builds on the ideas, evidence and proposals in the final report of the Cambridge Primary Review;*
- *builds on the research and practice of others who share the CPR's commitment to evidence, vision and quality in primary education;*
- *advances professional and community empowerment;*
- *improves the quality of primary education experienced by the nation's children, especially those who suffer material, social or educational disadvantage.*

The network is committed to:

- ***equity***, both social and educational
- ***empowerment*** of both children and teachers
- ***expertise*** in childhood, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and leadership
- ***excellence*** in learning and teaching.

PRIMARY EDUCATION: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

FIVE AGES OF POST-PLOWDEN PRIMARY EDUCATION

1967 - 1976: primary education *unchallenged*

1976 - 1987: primary education *challenged*

1987 - 1997: primary education *regulated*

1997 - 2010: primary education *dominated*

2011 - 2015: primary education - - - - - ?

Far too much of the rhetoric surrounding recent policy has been perversely and quite deliberately ahistorical. The real achievements of the period before 1997 have been ignored or denied. Wheels have been pointlessly re-invented. Initiatives have been introduced at such a pace that they have been superseded before being evaluated. The lessons of past attempts at reform have not been learned. The lessons of past research and development have been treated as irrelevant not because they are genuinely inapplicable but because they challenge the preferred political agenda ... (CPR final report, p 38)

IGNORING THE LESSONS OF HISTORY?

The primary school should not be regarded merely as a preparatory department for the subsequent stage, and the courses should be planned and conditioned ... not by the supposed requirements of the secondary stage, nor by the exigencies of an examination at the age of eleven, but by the needs of the child at that particular stage in his physical and mental development. The primary school should ... arouse in the pupil a keen interest in the things of the mind and in general culture, fix certain habits, and develop self-confidence.

Hadow Report, *The Primary School*, 1931

The mistaken belief, once widely held, that a concentration on basic skills is by itself enough to improve literacy and numeracy has left its mark. Many children are still given too little opportunity for work in the practical, scientific and aesthetic areas of the curriculum which increases not only their understanding in these areas but also their literacy and numeracy ... Over-concentration on the practice of basic skills in literacy and numeracy unrelated to a context in which they are needed means that those skills are insufficiently extended and applied.

White Paper, *Better Schools*, 1985

THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM: WHAT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

**1 – An entitlement curriculum which is
broad, balanced and rich,
which engages, excites and empowers,
which attends to children's present as well as future needs,
which addresses the condition of society and the wider world,
and is taught to the highest possible standard.**

**And to secure such a curriculum,
what else must we fight for?**

THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM: WHAT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

2 – A CURRICULUM PLANNING PROCESS WHICH EXEMPLIFIES RATHER THAN CONTRADICTS WHAT EDUCATION SHOULD BE ABOUT

- Examine, respect and apply the lessons of history. Remedy past errors, don't repeat them. Understand the imperative of cumulation.
- Use evidence discriminatingly but not selectively.
- Be knowledgeable about knowledge, skill, subjects, themes and other curriculum building blocks.
- Engage with the complexities of the culture in which which curriculum is embedded.
- Understand the connectedness of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.
- Do things in the right order, starting with aims.

THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM: WHAT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

3 – PROPER ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED, UNIMPEDED BY HISTORICAL HABIT OR POLITICAL INTEREST

- The current curriculum is inherently unmanageable: *‘How can we best help primary class teachers solve the “quarts into pint pots problem” of teaching 13 subjects, plus religious education, to sufficient depth, in the time available?’ (Rose)*

- Since many schools successfully plan and teach the whole of the current NC to high standard, it cannot be *inherently* unmanageable. And why is it the class teacher’s problem?
- Children’s statutory curriculum entitlement compromised by a narrow conception of ‘standards’, delivered through national strategies and tests and enforced by Ofsted and SIPs.
- Persistence of the mistaken belief that the pursuit of a broad and balanced curriculum is incompatible with achieving high standards in the ‘basics’.
- Not one curriculum but two: persistence of the historic division between ‘basics’ and the rest, aggravated by split between DCSF/DfE (‘standards’) and QCA/QCDA (curriculum).
- Impoverishment of the arts and humanities, and of learning in all areas that requires time for talking, problem-solving and the exploration of ideas.
- Excessive prescription and micromanagement.
- A muddled and reductive discourse about subjects, knowledge and skills.
- An absence of vision and purpose: aims as no more than cosmetic.
- Failure to address the long-standing question of curriculum capacity and expertise. **(CPR)**

THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM: WHAT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

4 – A CLEAR AND DEFENSIBLE FRAMEWORK OF AIMS AND VALUES

Address the perennially neglected question of what primary education is for.

The curriculum is in a very real sense pointless until we ask what education is for. Aims must be grounded in a clear framework of values - for education is at heart a moral matter - and in properly argued positions on childhood, society, the wider world and the nature and advancement of knowledge and understanding. And aims should shape curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the wider life of the school, not be added as mere decoration.

The Mrs Beeton approach - first catch your curriculum, then liberally garnish with aims - is not the way to proceed.

Although it is desirable to have a single set of aims for the whole of schooling, the needs of children and the imperatives of their education at different stages are also quite distinct ... We reject the claim in the final Rose report that there is a 'considerable match' between our aims for primary education and the QCA secondary aims which Rose proposes should apply to primary education as well ...

(CPR final report)

AIMS OFF THE SHELF?

England (QCDA/Rose)

Successful learners
Confident individuals
Responsible citizens

Scotland (Curriculum for Excellence)

Successful learners
Confident individuals
Responsible citizens
Effective contributors

Singapore (National curriculum)

Self-directed learners
Confident persons
Concerned citizens
Active contributors

Australia (National curriculum)

Successful learners
Confident and creative individuals
Active and informed citizens

AIMS: CPR WITNESSES' CONCERNS

- Literacy and numeracy are essential, but primary education is about more than the 3Rs, and in any case the received view of literacy remains far too narrow.
- We must move beyond the rhetoric of child-centredness and children's voice to meaningful commitment to the UNCRC.
- Children aren't just adults in the making, and primary education isn't just a preparation for secondary: early/middle childhood and primary education have their own imperatives.
- We must balance individual and societal needs; but also understand that societal need is about more than 'the world of work', the 'information society' or the 'knowledge economy'.
- Disadvantage and discrimination are corrosive; we must strive for equity across educational, social and economic policy.
- Individualism and materialism should be replaced by a commitment to human interdependence, mutual respect and global sustainability.
- Schools are vital both *in* communities and *as* communities: the advancement of community is a necessary educational goal, in its way as important as individual fulfilment.
- Citizenship should be conceived and enacted locally and globally as well as nationally.
- Faith and belief are deeply embedded in our history and culture, but they demand an educational response different from RE as traditionally defined.

AIMS: AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK FROM THE CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW

For details, see CPR final report, pp 197-199

THE INDIVIDUAL

- Well-being
- Engagement
- Empowerment
- Autonomy

SELF, OTHERS AND THE WIDER WORLD

- Encouraging respect & reciprocity
- Promoting interdependence & sustainability
- Empowering local, national & global citizenship
- Celebrating culture & community

LEARNING, KNOWING AND DOING

- Exploring, knowing, understanding, making sense
- Fostering skill
- Exciting the imagination
- Enacting dialogue

THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM: WHAT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

5 – AGREED PRINCIPLES OF PROCEDURE FOR PLANNING AND MANAGING THE CURRICULUM

FOR EXAMPLE (Cambridge Primary Review final report, pp 195-7):

- **Entitlement:** to a primary curriculum which is broad, balanced and rich, and thereby provides a proper foundation for lifelong learning.
- **Depth:** breadth and balance are not just about inclusion on the timetable; breadth makes no sense without depth.
- **Balance:** primary education is not just preparation for secondary; it must respond to children's current development and needs, and enhance the quality of their lives now as well as tomorrow.
- **Equity:** equality of access to a broad, balanced, well-taught curriculum for all children.
- **Quality** as the pursuit of high standards across the board, not just in what is tested.
- **Accessibility:** balancing national consistency with responsiveness to cultural plurality and to local needs and opportunities.
- **Rigour:** in professional thinking and debate about curriculum matters, and in teaching and learning.
- **Progression, continuity and consistency:** between and within phases.
- **Empowerment:** of teachers as builders and energisers of curriculum and of children as learners.
- **Capacity:** ensuring schools have the expertise, leadership and resources to meet all the requirements above.

THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM: WHAT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

6 – A NEW CONCEPT OF 'STANDARDS', WITH ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS TO MATCH

It is no longer acceptable to define 'standards' by reference to test scores in English and mathematics alone ... Current notions of 'standards' and 'quality' should be replaced by a more comprehensive framework which relates to the entirety of what a school does and how it performs, judged against broad educational aims as well as specific criteria for children's progress and performance. (CPR final report)

CPR Policy Priority 6: abandon the dogma that there is no alternative to SATs.

Stop treating testing and assessment as synonymous. Stop making Year 6 tests bear the triple burden of assessing pupils, evaluating schools and monitoring national performance. Abandon the naive belief that testing of itself drives up standards. It doesn't: good teaching does. Initiate wholesale assessment reform drawing on the wealth of alternative models now available, so that we can at last have systems of formative and summative assessment - in which tests certainly have a place - which do their jobs validly, reliably and without causing collateral damage. Adopt the CPR's definition of standards as excellence in all domains of the curriculum to which children are statutorily entitled, not just the 3Rs.

The issue is not whether children should be assessed or schools should be accountable – they should – but how and in relation to what. (CPR Policy Priorities, 2010)

THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM: WHAT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

7 – KNOWLEDGEABLE, SKILFUL AND PRINCIPLED PEDAGOGY

Pedagogy is the act of teaching together with its attendant discourse of educational theories, values, evidence and justifications. It is what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command, in order to make and justify the many kinds of decision of which teaching is constituted..

Pedagogy is the heart of the enterprise. It gives life to educational aims and values, lifts the curriculum from the printed page, mediates knowing and learning, engages, inspires and empowers learners – or sadly, fails to do so ... Good teaching makes a difference. Excellent teaching can transform lives.

We need to move to a position where research-grounded repertoires and principles are introduced through initial training and refined and extended through experience and CPD, and teachers – like doctors - acquire as much command of the evidence and principles which underpin their practice as they do of the skills needed in their use. The test of this alternative view of professionalism is that teachers should be able to give a coherent justification for their plans and decisions citing (i) evidence, (ii) pedagogical principle, (iii) educational aims, rather than offering the unsafe defence of compliance with what others expect. Anything less is educationally unsound.

(CPR final report)

THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM: WHAT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

8 – CAPACITY TO REALISE THE VISION

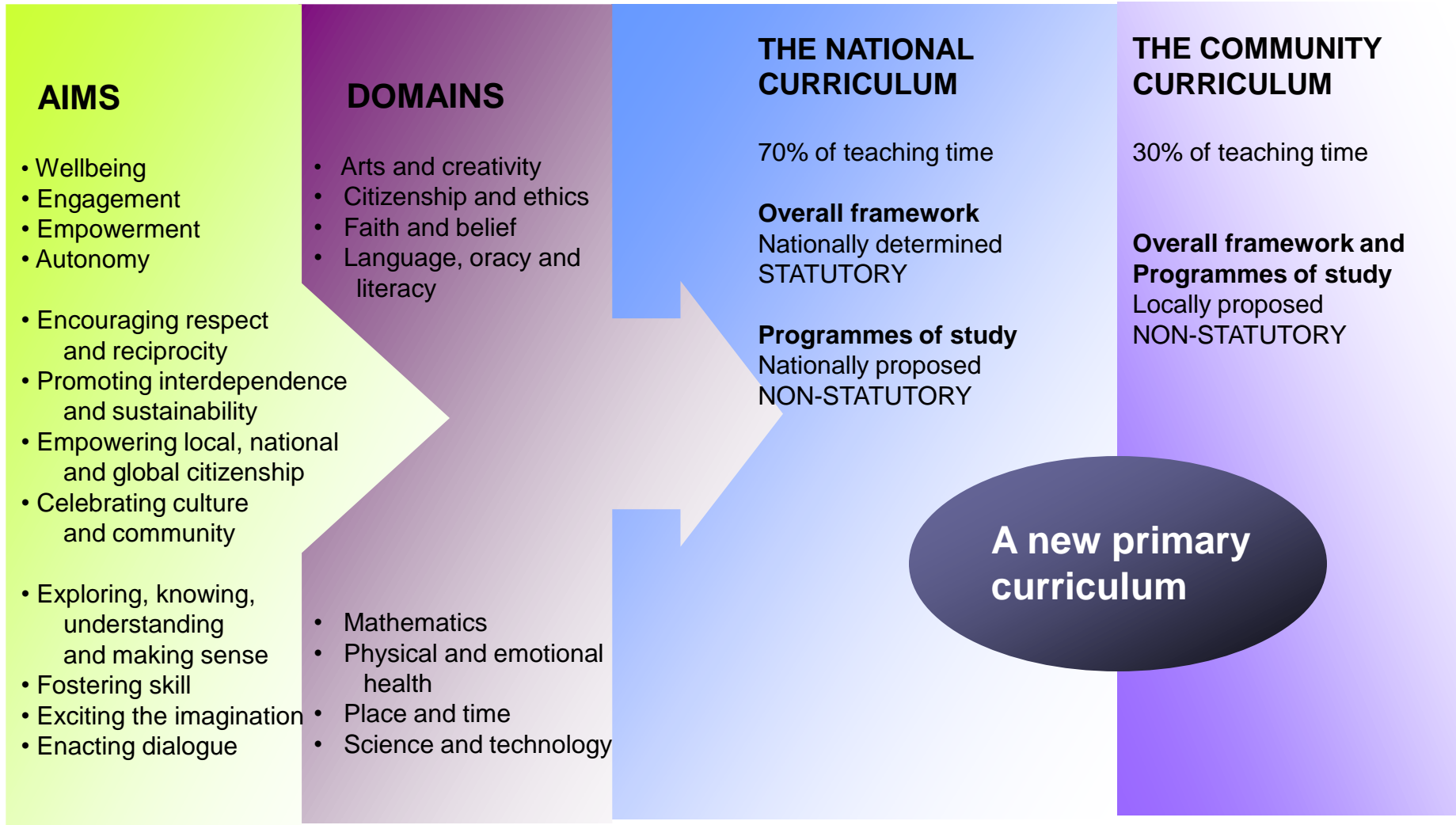
*We must work to strengthen what, according to international research, separates the best teachers from the rest: **their depth of knowledge and engagement with what is to be taught, the quality and cognitive power of the classroom interaction they orchestrate, and their skill in assessing and providing feedback on pupils' learning** – all day, every day, not just in Year 6 and not just in literacy and numeracy ...*

*The long-standing failure to resolve the mismatch between the curriculum to be taught, the focus of teacher training and the staffing of primary schools must be resolved without delay. The principle to be applied is the one of entitlement adopted throughout this report: **children have a right to a curriculum which is consistently well taught regardless of the perceived significance of its various elements or the amount of time devoted to them. Primary schools should be staffed with sufficient flexibility to allow this principle to be applied ... The urgency of this task requires a full national primary staffing review.***

(CPR final report)

AN ALTERNATIVE PRIMARY CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

(Cambridge Primary Review final report, chapter 14)



There is a necessary relationship between how teachers think about their practice and how children learn. Pupils will not learn to think for themselves if their teachers are merely expected to do as they are told.

We must work to strengthen what, according to international research, separates the best teachers from the rest: their depth of knowledge and engagement with what is to be taught, the quality and cognitive power of the classroom interaction they orchestrate, and their skill in assessing and providing feedback on pupils' learning – all day, every day, not just in Year 6 and not just in literacy and numeracy.

The test of this alternative view of professionalism is that teachers should be able to give a coherent justification for their practices citing evidence, pedagogical principles and educational aims rather than offering the unsafe defence of compliance with what others expect. Anything less is educationally unsound.



Children, their World, their Education

Final report and recommendations of
the Cambridge Primary Review



*** WHY NOT JOIN US? ***

www.primaryreview.org.uk

www.routledge.com/education

n