

THE ROUND

CURRICULUM
BLOGROLL
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THE POWER OF NORMATIVE MESSAGES

About 6 years ago, I was struggling to get a Year 11 class to take independent revision seriously. I nagged them a lot until I came across a study that helped me change the way I was addressing the issue, and which – I think – changed their attitude.

The study was psychologist Robert B. Cialdini's [‘Crafting Normative Messages...’](#) and it made me realise that in nagging the whole class for their lack of work, I was actually giving them the message: this lack of effort is normal behaviour – individuals could see that they were in the majority rather than the minority and therefore their

lack of effort was, to them, perfectly acceptable within the group.

So I changed my approach and started talking about the work that I *was* receiving. The independent workrate increased. Everybody wanted to be a part of the ‘normative behaviour’ group.

Cialdini: ‘There is an understandable, but misguided, tendency to try to mobilize action against a problem by depicting it as regrettably frequent. Information campaigns emphasize that alcohol and drug use is intolerably high, that

adolescent suicide rates are alarming, and – most relevant to this article – that rampant polluters are spoiling the environment. Although these claims may be both true and well intentioned, the campaigns’ creators have missed something critically important: Within the statement “Many people are doing this undesirable thing” lurks the powerful and undercutting normative message “Many people are doing this.”

I wrote more about this [here](#).

CURRICULUM

FROM CURRICULUM THINKERS

For this edition, I wanted to share with you some of the most thought-provoking and interesting writing on curriculum. Over the past few years, I've read lots on curriculum and bookmarked many articles that have challenged my thinking or helped me clarify my understanding of curriculum planning. Most of the writers here are current practitioners: senior leaders, heads of department and subject leaders; and they are sharing the ways they have thought about and approached curriculum planning in their schools.

This isn't a comprehensive must-read list, rather a collection of links to dip into when thinking about curriculum.

To begin with, some writing from Christine Counsell, probably the leading curriculum developer of recent times. She wrote a series of blogs on 'Senior Curriculum Leadership', which are useful for anyone designing or leading on curriculum:

['Curriculum as narrative'](#) is really useful in its identification of the **proximal** and **ultimate functions** of knowledge as well as the concepts of the **core** and the **hinterland**: what she says is "*the*

important thing to help me think about [...] curricula."

In ['Final performance as deceiver and guide'](#), Counsell shows how looking at Year 7 allows us to provide students with 'knowledge that flavours the claim' in Year 11. Read it to find out what that means!

In a similar vein, another curriculum developer, Daisy Christodoulou writes extensively about the problems with focusing on the final GCSE to inform the whole of the curriculum in ['What happens when you outsource the curriculum to the exam syllabus'](#) and ['Why teaching to the test is so bad'](#).

In ['What is Mastery? The good, the bad, the ugly'](#), Christodoulou looks at the idea of the mastery curriculum.

This [primer on Michael Oakeshott](#) is a good start when it comes to thinking what an *ambitious* curriculum might look like. Oakeshott sees education as an initiation into "the conversation of mankind": that it is to learn about and interrogate the ideas that make up or cultural inheritance. This

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is also something which Michael Merrick takes up in his article, [‘Forming the Curriculum’](#): “examinations capture a slice of what has been taught; they should not become the outer limits of what we teach.”

Claire Stoneman, a leader in a Birmingham school, wrote a series of blogs warning against the various mistakes we can make when designing curricula: [‘Curriculum: A Warning, Part 1’](#) introduces the series strongly, but [‘Thou shalt not pay lip service’](#) and [‘Thou shalt not panic’](#) are the most thought-provoking – important reading before anyone approaches curriculum design. Also noteworthy: [‘If we don’t think, curriculum dies’](#).

From Assistant Headteacher and Science teacher Ruth Walker, [‘My plan to reform our curriculum’](#) gives very practical steps to take in curriculum design. This set of [concepts and vocabulary for designing curriculum](#) is also very good. Walker also writes as part of the Curriculum in Science Symposium, alongside a wealth of other Science educators and leaders. Their articles are helpful for all subject leaders and can be found [here](#).

Michael Fordham used to work alongside Christine Counsell on the University of Cambridge History PGCE. He writes [widely about curriculum](#). Here are a few worthy of a look: like Christodoulou and Counsell, Fordham also sees the benefits of seeing [‘the curriculum as progression model’](#), a clearer way of looking at how measure progress through the curriculum itself. He also challenges the way that teaching and learning has been prioritised over curriculum in recent years in [‘Why does pedagogy dominate curriculum?’](#) He also looks at the

problems with tightly choreographed central planning in [‘Curriculum neglect, pedagogical prescription and the problem of the scripted lesson’](#).

Head of Science, Adam Boxer has written widely about how he has approached curriculum design in his setting. [The One Stop Shop](#) is a document that uses and build on the vocabulary identified in Ruth Walker’s article (see the links at the end of it). [‘Planning smarter: rethinking the short, medium and long term’](#) documents the change he has made to approaching curriculum design. His [‘Curriculum Don’ts’](#) is also a good challenge to our thinking: how many do you agree with?

Martin Robinson recently wrote an excellent book called ‘Curriculum: Athena versus the Machine’ (I have a copy if anyone wishes to borrow it). He also keeps a great blog summarising some of his ideas about curriculum, including this provocative one: [‘Curriculum is Not a Journey. An Argument Against an Aims-Led Approach’](#).

Andrew Percival is a primary Assistant Headteacher whose writing about curriculum is as relevant to secondary schools as it is primary. [‘Confessions of a curriculum leader’](#) is a good place to start.

You may not necessarily agree with everything written here, but the articles selected make good provocation when thinking about curriculum. Dip in and see what intrigues you here.

FEBRUARY 2020

(NOT A) BLOGROLL

SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT THIS TIME

As the main article in this edition is a huge collection of links to article and blogs, I've decided not to throw any more at you here!

Instead, I thought I'd share this diagram from Adam Boxer about how he thinks a subject domain should be taught. What do you think? Would yours be different to this?

And this diagram is from Christine Counsell. She says: "Imagine each termly exam as a percentage. If marks stay the same (above a certain threshold), they're making progress because: i) they've learned new stuff; ii) they've recalled & integrated old stuff; iii) questions are harder/broader."

If you have any questions about anything in this edition, please don't hesitate to email me – j.theobald@wildern.org – or come and find me in room 109! James

