

Exploring the Discursive Construction of National Identity Through the Building of the New Curriculum for Wales

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ABSTRACT

Wales is currently undergoing its largest-ever educational reform in the shape of a new curriculum. The said reform has led to the emergence, and use, of multiple themes of identity and nation. This article employs Foucauldian discourse analysis to explore the discursive construction of national identity in the building of the new curriculum. Through locating and exploring the subjectification of learners' identity, the paper discusses the potential for identity and belonging within the new curriculum. It locates identity as diverse, fluid, spatial and strategic, and explores the potential outcomes of these discursive constructions. The findings reveal that such discourses interact with, and are related to, one another, but also bring with them the potential for conflict and contradiction. The project notes many complexities and nuances in themes of identities and belonging within the new curriculum. The work finds potential for belonging as well as barriers such as alienation and exclusion. Finally, it advises some caution regarding the notion that these barriers can be overcome for all learners in the implementation of the new curriculum.

Keywords: identity, national identity, belonging, Wales, Foucault, curriculum, Foucauldian discourse analysis.

Introduction

Wales is facing the most substantial change in its education policy to date. The Welsh Government has decided that now is the time for the re-framing, re-writing and deployment of its new national curriculum. The school years are seen as an important time for all young people in terms of their identity and constructing ideas about the self. This article addresses the question of national identity and its relationship with the newly-built curriculum. Former Education Minister, Kirsty Williams set out the new curriculum, declaring that it will be “*Welsh* people deciding what is taught in *Welsh* schools” (2020). The current national re-framing places key importance on the identities of who it is written by and for whom it is intended. This paper endeavours to examine how the new curriculum discursively frames ideas of national identity and belonging, highlighting the potential tensions of their embodiment. It is hoped that doing so will lead to an air of caution when it comes to considering how these ideas can be handled and explored in practice.

Arguments regarding, and defences of, identity and belonging, have formed, and continue to form, key debates taking place in current and recent conversations surrounding Brexit, Housing, COVID-19, devolution and independence in Wales (McGrattan and Williams, 2017, p.465). Of course, it is not only in Wales that we have seen such a rise in nationalist sentiment (May et al., 2020), but with that said, we are seeing the nation and national identity playing an increasingly important role in modern politics and the ‘social landscape’ of Wales (McGrattan and Williams, 2017, p.466). Wales also has an interesting context in terms of national identity, as a nation-state within the United Kingdom, with influence and control being exerted by both the Welsh and Westminster governments. Indeed, I suggest that the way in which Wales chooses to represent, through devolved education policy, its ideals and ideas around national identity and belonging, will frame the trajectory of these wider debates further in years to come.

It is interesting to look back at the work carried out by Daugherty and Jones, who, in 1999, gave consideration to the use of geography in the curriculum for developing a sense of community and national identity. They predicted that it would be “less likely in future that, with education policy in the hands of an elected Welsh Assembly, decisions about the school curriculum in Wales will be taken in London” (1999, p.458). They were correct; since the election of a National Assembly for Wales in 1999, legislative decisions over education, now devolved to the Welsh Assembly, have continued to give more autonomy and scope for the re-shaping and individualisation of

education in Wales. The new curriculum now looks vastly different from the curriculum it once partially shared with England. The new curriculum has received praise and apprehension for its non-prescriptive and adaptable framework, where schools are asked to develop their curriculum to suit the needs and wants of their locality. Its purpose-based approach will allow for personalisation, adaptation and local interpretation. The curriculum does, however, give some guidance, such as necessary cross-cutting themes. It is in these cross-cutting themes that we see the topics of identity and belonging coming up the most. In the past, the topics of identity and citizenship have been represented through *Y Curriculum Cymreig*.¹ Indeed, the way in which the *Y Curriculum Cymreig* has met the needs of citizenship education, as well as its role in promoting ‘Welshness’, has been explored in the past by Smith (2015;2016), who called for a “more critically oriented and socially just” (2015, p.199) approach. Now, with perhaps less formal prescription than the *Y Curriculum Cymreig*, schools will be asked to engage with ideas of identity and citizenship using the cross-curricula themes for guidance. If such ideas of nation identity are relied upon, but also with some freedom as to their interpretation, attention must be given to their meaning, discursive formation and potential implication for learners. This work looks at resources produced in reaction to and as part of the new curriculum so as to examine the current and changing construction of national identity in Wales. This paper situates national identity as discursively constructed in society and as an intersectional component of one’s self. It also conceives of national identity as having practical implications for the learners’ subjective embodiment in society, intersecting in the way those persons feel able to belong within a nation. It is the purpose of this work to explore how the above-mentioned discourses of national identity could be imagined by schools within the new curriculum, shedding light on the tensions which may exist within and between the said discourses. In a society where our subjectivities can be framed by our identities and capability in terms of belonging, interrogating how these discursive formations are made and spread through policies and politics in education is crucial if we aim to disrupt the discrimination which they have the potential to perpetuate.

The issue of identity and belonging

Identity, national identity and belonging are phenomena on which this article relies strongly. Identity and belonging are terms that are both ambiguous and ubiquitous, whilst they have also been difficult to define

for many years (Eaude, 2020, p.17; Mercer, 1990, p.43; Weedon, 2004, p.155). This has not stopped many people, myself included, from continuing to attempt to define, explore and use these concepts. Multiple authors concur, above all, that identities are constructed through difference and have the potential and power to divide (Laclau, 1990, p.33; Ott, 2003, pp.56–57; Morley and Robins, 1989). Eaude also reminds us that there is always a constructed hierarchy of identities and that such a hierarchy is often implicitly built or suggested (2020, p.21). Viewing identities as having the ability to mark differences and divide and maintain a hierarchical system, gives, for me, a clear rationale which can be used to attempt to reconceptualise and reconstruct thinking toward the above phenomena. We must otherwise be content with the existence of these hierarchies and binaries, and their impact on the subjectivity of lived reality. The current article will question the inherent ‘nature’ of national identity, or, in the words of Hall, to put these “concepts under erasure” so they are no longer good to think with (1996).

An early take on identity, which this work actively refutes, is that of an essentialist construction of identity. Emerging early in philosophy and religion, through dualist and materialist accounts of identity, essentialist views hold ideas that encapsulate a ‘true’ and ‘essential’ nature of things in a way physical forms cannot. This work aims to actively refute ‘natural’, fixed and stable views of identity. In relation to national identity, essentialist conceptions of identity can bring about a ‘us’ and ‘them’ rhetoric, with the conception of an inherent or natural affiliation and belonging to a country. In examining the concept of nation, May et al. discuss the implication of national identity as “that is, those people who can claim an ‘authentic’ national identity and whose interests are to be protected from internal and external threats – is depicted in homogeneous and unified terms. This majority is seen as having the right to rule, while minority populations are marginalised” (2020, p.1056). This can lead to the formation of the ‘other’ and ‘othering’, discriminating, stereotyping and exclusions (Zilliacus et al., 2017, p.169; Kurzwelley et al., 2020). In contrast with essentialism, Foucault does not connect identity to the metaphysical self, but instead to a combination of modes by which individuals are made subjects in a culture (Foucault, 1982). For Foucault, identity is not a fixed substance or essence, but a historical endeavour constantly in flux, rendering the ‘self-evident’ and natural status of identity as problematic. Instead, Foucault constructs identity as a political notion that is needed for the power relations through which citizens are made subjects. A national

identity can be considered a discursive formation (Foucault, 1972) which sorts and standardises ideological assumptions of identity, making something 'the norm', and the 'other'. Using Foucault's ideas of identity and denying identity as a metaphysical essence opens up a new space for exploring and questioning notions of identity. At this point, we may ask certain questions: What ideas of identity does the curriculum construct, and for what purpose or agenda? Who are these constructions of identity serving? It is even perhaps pertinent to ask how such constructions could be constituted differently. For Foucault, that is exactly why we should ask such questions.

This paper refers to discourse as part of institutions and institutional practices, and are "ways of organizing, regulating and administering social life" (Willig, 2008, p.113). Using Foucault's idea, in this article, schools can be located as institutions that establish and construct discourses of national identity and power flows that are both influenced by, and form, social practice. We can see policy and curriculum building as a way of forming regulations and institutional practices which have the potential to regulate learners' identities. Here we can also see learners as subjects to the curriculum and, in turn, as subjects of the recognised knowledge and truth that the curriculum conveys. The specific discursive focus on national identity in this article is a reflection of the subject being examined and the time in which the current research finds itself, i.e. Wales, as a nation-state within the United Kingdom going through a period of change. As mentioned above, there is a complexity to national identity in Wales, since it is a country within an independent sovereign state, namely the United Kingdom. In thinking of national identity and its political and social significance, we can see how discourses of national identity hold power over people, allowing or disallowing, the potential for belonging. Past authors have written that belonging is a concept intrinsically and closely connected to the ideas and idealism of nation-states (Calhoun, 2003, p.532; Brubaker, 2010). Relating to belonging is important, since, although subjects may have legal nationality or citizenship, this might not give an automatic affordance of belonging (Brubaker, 2010; Geddes and Favell, 1998, Skey, 2011, 2014). Belonging relates to the subjective affordances which the categorisation of national identity allows. Yuval-Davis (2006) positions belonging as being "about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home'" (p.197). She remarks on how this feeling seems to be "naturalized and becomes articulated and politicized only when it is threatened in some way" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.197). As is the case with identity, belonging

also seems to be a topic when it is under erasure or working to divide and exclude. Furthermore, if belonging is to feel safe and at home in a place, then the politics of belonging “comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.197). The current work aims to bridge the crossover between the potential for belonging by looking at the politics of belonging through discursive constructions of national identities in the curriculum. Using ideas of belonging in this way helps us to connect the political agendas of the discursive construction of national identity through the building of the new curriculum with the subjective reality for people in Wales today. Using topics of identity and belonging, we can explore and consider these concepts as not as clear cut as first considered, but constituted and formed in discourse, with an impact on ones subjective reality.

Methodology

True to its name, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) comes from Foucauldian and post-structuralist ideas. It is through critique that post-structuralists can problematise and destabilise ‘taken-for-granted’ truths and knowledge. It is the intention of this research, by using post-structural methodologies as a vehicle for thought, to attempt to expose, stretch and distort a multiplicity of multi-layered, conflicting discourses of national identity. Numerous authors have attempted to map out a speculative method for FDA. In the same way, Foucault’s work resisted categorisation and formulated processes (Ball, 2013, p.113) FDA has been critiqued for being vague and lacking a clearly defined structure with no ‘set method’ as such (Burr, 2015; Garrity, 2010). During Foucault’s work, his methods and ideas changed to fit the subject (Willig and Rogers, 2017, p.110), just as the demands of each question of the discourse should lead and determine the approach used in this work.

Seven resources were chosen for analysis, all published from 2019 to 2021 (see table 1). The publication dates of these pieces reflect the recent and imminent change to the curriculum. The resources were chosen as they all, in some way, have, or had, influence, whilst they are also a part of the formation of, or are a reflection of, the new curriculum from the Welsh Government or affiliated organisations. Moreover, they all have something to say about national identity, whether explicitly or

implicitly. Each resource will be used by various educational stakeholders to inform and influence how they design their new curriculum, choose their materials or teach their classes. The resources differ in format – some being promotional videos and others being more direct in their influence in the form of policy and guidance documents. Text was considered in multiple forms to reflect the potential discursive constructions of identity beyond those of linguistics and language. To aid in addressing the elusiveness of such work, the qualitative analysis software NVivo was used to help with the recognition and organisation of discourses. Themes were generated by considering the common and dominant, as well as the conflicting and contradicting, narratives. The way in which these themes were decided upon was also a reflection of the validity framework that this post-structuralist enquiry aimed to work around. The said themes were decided upon by giving attention and focus to the oppositional, discontinuities, complexities and paradoxes within the resources (Lather, 1993, p.686). Using ideas from Lather's transgressive validity concept and positioning validity as "an incitement to discourse" (1993, p.674) offers us an alternative approach to analysis and validity. She urges us to reconceptualise validity in a way which is "grounded in theorizing our practice" (Lather, 1993, p.674). Validity under such a framework aims to "loosen the master code of positivism" which continues to control and shape even postpositivist work today. In this respect, the current project avoided only looking for, and counting, reoccurring and dominant themes, instead using a Foucauldian ontology and epistemology to determine the way in which the work was analysed. Although all four of Lather's framings have something to offer this work, the current paper employed the frame of paralogical validity as its main framework. Avoiding linear and simple answers, themes were organised by difference and heterogeneity.

From this analysis, there emerged four discourses to be assessed. The present work then utilised Willig's (2008) guidance towards FDA, applying the six steps to each discourse. These six steps encourage us to take the discourses (1) and question their construction (2) as well as the differences within them (3). We are then asked to consider what is gained from their creation (4), the subject positions which they allow (5), and, finally, the possibilities for these positionings (6). The current work did not explicitly explore all six steps separately, as they are sometimes difficult to separate; blending these steps should be considered a reflection of the research paradigm within which this paper works.

Table 1: resources analysed

| <i>Title of Resource</i> | <i>Date Published</i> | <i>Format</i> | <i>Produced by</i> |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 1-Cross-cutting themes for designing your curriculum. Part of designing your curriculum | 28/01/20 | Web page | Education Wales |
| 2-Education in Wales is changing | 25/01/2019 | Video | Education Wales |
| 3-Teaching about the multi-ethnic nature of Wales: teachers prompt sheet | 01/08/20 | Web page | Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities Communities, Contributions and Cynefin in the New Curriculum Working Group |
| 4-Final report - Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities Communities, Contributions and Cynefin in the New Curriculum Working Group | 19/03/21 | Final Report | Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities Communities, Contributions and Cynefin in the New Curriculum Working Group |
| 5-Teaching of Welsh history report | 11/19 | Findings Report | National Assembly for Wales, Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee |
| 6-Curriculum for Wales guidance | 01/20 | Curriculum guidance document | Education Wales |
| 7-‘Curriculum and assessment Bill’ | 10/03/21 | Video | Education Wales |

Findings and Discussions

Identities as diverse

One of the most prevalent and explicitly written discourses around identity within the resources situates identities as being diverse. Identity as a whole, not just in terms of national identity, has been discursively constructed in this way throughout each resource analysed. The most obvious example states that ‘learners’ understanding of Wales should also recognise how different perspectives, values and identities shape Wales, rather than presenting a simplistic characterisation of a uniform Welsh identity’ (Education Wales, 2020). This kind of discursive construction is also seen in messages such as “diversity is not a threat to Wales but part of its historical character. These understandings are critical to the identity of learners” (Williams et al., 2021, p.20). In a similar vein to Grossberg, who asserts that identities are made from “partial fragments” (1996, p.9), we can see, throughout many parts of the resources, the acknowledgement of a multiplicity and diversity and difference within and between identities. Putting this discourse to task within Willig’s framework, the idea of identity as diverse is offered by the resources at three levels: individual identity, diversity in local and school communities, and, finally, at a national level. Firstly, at an individual identity level, there are numerous instances where the resources discuss the potential for individuals to have multiple and diverse strands to their identities. The curriculum guidance recognises that learners need “confidence in their identities” (Welsh Government, 2020, p.30). The plurality in ‘identities’ shows that the curriculum recognises individuals have not just one identity, but the potential to have many strands or aspects within their identity. Secondly, at a school and community level, there is a wider acknowledgement of the diversity and multiplicity of identities within and between schools and communities asking learners to “develop an understanding of complex, pluralistic and diverse nature of societies” (Welsh Government, 2020, p.101). Finally, at a macro level, identity is offered at a national or even global level. At a national level, learners are encouraged to appreciate that having an “understanding of Wales should also recognise how different perspectives, values and identities shape Wales, rather than presenting a simplistic characterisation of a uniform Welsh identity” (Welsh Government, 2020, p.45). Although differing slightly in appearance, all three levels and examples of discursive constructions offer a possibility for diverse and multiple

identities. The choice of ‘level’ or type of diversity is altered depending on the audience and purpose of each resource considered. We may consider that every text has a possible reason for stating that the learners’ construction of diversity of identity should take place in a specific way. It is interesting to note that the more official policy documents, guidance and reports address diversity far more explicitly, relying more on all three levels of construction of diversity in their writing.

Here it is fitting to remember Willig’s (2008) contention that discursive constructions should be considered both implicitly and explicitly, but we must also look at omitted ideas of diversity; here, national identity is brought to our attention. Although the curriculum offers varying levels of diversity for most aspects of identity, when considering national identity it strongly presents such identity as uniform and homogenous, with little obvious diversity. Within formal documents, there are multiple examples of diversity in identities, notably “sex, gender, religion, age, disability and sexuality” (Welsh Government, 2020). The aspect upon which this article places particular focus, namely national, receives no explicit mention of difference other than that of a Welsh national identity. Notably, there is also no mention of a British or European identity anywhere within the resources considered, perhaps indicating some conflict, or presumptions, which the curriculum is making about national identities in Wales. For a country within the United Kingdom, and which, until recently, shared its curriculum with England, to see no mention is perhaps a construction of the self in relation to the other. By omission, the construction of a national identity, which is anything but English/British/European/other could be formulated. This, of course, is only one example; multiple mutualities of nationalities could and will also be true for learners’ identities in Wales, which are othered by omission in the discursive construction of the new curriculum. It is interesting to consider why the building of the curriculum does not offer this type of diversity in its constructions. Such diversity is not only omitted, but also, in contrast, there is repeated explicit mentioning of a Welsh national identity throughout. The narrative of a new ‘national mission’ towards education reform positions Wales as reinventing its educational journey, with a strong emphasis on this being an independent, national, ‘Welsh’ journey. Although official documents tend to put aside homogenous, uniform and stereotypical representations of national identity in Wales, in resources from advertisements and marketing, such as videos, we see less of this ‘putting aside’, and are instead offered more of a singular, and perhaps stereotypical, image of national

identity. Most prominently, in the *Education in Wales is Changing* video, the voice addresses the audience as ‘Team Wales’, with schools located where ‘Wales was made’. The audio is direct in addressing the nation as a whole and presents, and relies upon, cliché and essentialist images of identity, such as valleys, Welsh flags, daffodils, rugby stadiums, and coal mines (Education Wales, 2019). Whilst the video offers multiple examples of diversity in terms of race, gender, and age, it displays no sign of diverse national identity, strengthened by a strong homogenous idea of Welsh national identity. This exploration goes towards answering Willig’s third question regarding why identity is being constructed in this way. The curriculum wants to be, or at least appear accepting of, diverse and multiple identities, but it also seems to want to hold a strong national Welsh identity. Perhaps the complexity of multiple nationalities does not fit the current ‘national mission’, and Wales wishes to look as united as possible in its development, staying clear of imagery that might ‘threat’ the uniformity. Through a national rhetoric, alongside the omission of other national identities, the curriculum builds a uniform national identity to meet its *national* goal.

This dilemma, given Willig’s fifth and sixth steps, shines a light on the possibilities and consequences for learners. We can begin to see that, although the curriculum may offer diverse identities in some ways, it can also contain barriers to diversity and multiplicities, such as national identity, as exemplified above. Finally, of course, although a diverse image of identity is constructed, there is a clear main and overarching Welsh national narrative. This overarching narrative could be particularly isolating for anyone who do not feel their identity ‘fits’ within such a Welsh identity. In this respect, by offering an overarching construction of national identity, the curriculum presents an implicit hierarchy of national identities. Whether intentional or not, Skey (2011, 2014) tells of how hierarchies of belonging prevail to conceive how some people come to feel they belong, more so than others, to nations. Constructing such a strong national discourse could be isolating and othering for those who do not discursively or otherwise ‘see’ themselves within this framing.

Identities as fluid

The second discourse of identity focused on within the seven resources was the discursive construction of identity as fluid. We are offered an image of identity as changeable and malleable through time, especially a

young person's time in school, when he/she or they are exposed to the curriculum. Examples of this reveal the school being cited as where Wales was "made" (Education Wales, 2019), and the teaching of history and culture being deemed as "essential in *creating* a Welsh identity" (Sayed, 2019, p.6, own emphasis). This gives us the impression that subjects are not born with their national identity, but instead, it is shaped and created by exposure to certain events and types of knowledge.

Weedon (2004, p.19) asserts that "Identity is perhaps best understood as a limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one is". Within this fluid discourse, there are also examples of a temporal element to consider, which begins to answer the second question offered to us by Willig. Identities are given the potential to change through time as they are exposed to the curriculum. Examples of this discourse are seen in the contentions that the school is "where Wales was made" and where "we learn who we can be" (Education Wales, 2019). Learners are given the potential to 'become', learn, change, adapt and find their national identity within the curriculum and schooling. The different constructions of this fluidity can be seen as notions of becoming a citizen, learning about identity, or feeling a sense of belonging within their environment. In some texts, we see a stronger emphasis on this fluidity of identities, e.g. where a change in identity or perception of identity is used to address issues of racism, intolerance and inequality. Here, the idea that we can change people's sense of own identity and beliefs about identity through exposure to the curriculum is stronger. This is an element that the current paper re-visits in the final discourse of identity as strategic. Allowing identity to be constructed in this way makes the curriculum an active part of the learners' identity construction. It gives the curriculum agency to change or adapt subjects' identities. In refuting the static, fixed or necessarily essential nature of identity and instead encouraging an idea of a fluid and adaptable position, the curriculum can shape and mould identity. As stated by Bauman (1996), "In such a world, identities can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume" (p.23). In this setting, we can consider the curriculum as a wardrobe facilitating and tailoring potential identities to suit the temperature or season.

Throughout multiple texts, we see considerable concern given to what knowledge and content will be taught to learners within the new curriculum – in particular, what is taught in the humanities. There exists a strong narrative which holds that history is a tool used to inform, mould and shape identities and relationships with national identity (Williams

et al., 2021; Sayed, 2019). The narrative sees history as an important element in learning who we are, also stating that it helps form our national identities and sense of belonging. In one document we see the following statement: “The teaching of Welsh history and culture throughout the curriculum is essential in creating a Welsh identity” (Sayed, 2019, p.6). There is a concern that learners will find it more than difficult to develop an awareness of their national identity, heritage and sense of belonging without a history to which they can relate. Of course, the next question which this poses is ‘what knowledge and history will be chosen to be taught?’ If identity is constructed as fluid, what influence the fluid identity is exposed to is important.

Although schools are free to decide on their knowledge and curriculum content, within the cross-curricular themes there is a considerable emphasis on Welsh history, and so such teaching is difficult to avoid. There is still political debate surrounding whether or not Welsh history should be a compulsory element, with Plaid Cymru, the national party for Wales, being particularly concerned that it would be missed. It is interesting that political parties see history as one of the important elements within the new curriculum for the development of national identity. In the same respect, there are multiple concerns expressed in the resources regarding the lack of teaching of diverse and minority histories, as well as concerns around who will be teaching them and the training and experience needed to do this well (Williams et al., 2021; Sayed, 2019). Choosing the ‘right knowledge’ for the ‘right location’ seems more important than ever when it comes to protecting, allowing and encouraging constructions of national identity and belonging for learners from all backgrounds and national identities.

In practice, this discourse makes it possible for the curriculum to influence one’s national identity by using tools such as history teaching. Potentially, the discourse gives the curriculum power to construct or favour particular knowledge and histories, in turn favouring certain aspects of identity and potential for belonging. Importantly, we must remember that “belongings are conditioned by our bodies and where they are placed on the globe” (Carrillo Rowe, 2008, p.43), which means that not every form of belonging is possible, as people are not “free to choose their belongings outside of the bounds of power” (Carrillo Rowe, 2008, p.43). Again, we must remember that, for some, this privilege is much easier to access, and for others, the process will be more complex and challenging, if available at all. Offering the ‘correct’ knowledge is not an automatic

arrival at a feeling of belonging. In consideration of Willig's final question of consequences, this discourse rejects the idea of a fixed identity and allows all learners to be adaptable, and have the potential, under the Welsh Curriculum, to feel a sense of belonging in Wales. Considering May's thinking on belonging as the "dynamic and relational concept, between the self and society" (May, 2011), we see how belonging is in relation to identity and the accepted knowledge that society produces. For belonging, this discourse offers the potential to belong as a process rather than a 'natural' site of existence (Antonsich, 2010, p.652). On the other hand, although this fluidity gives potential, we can see how other factors, such as knowledge, history and content, may influence and favour certain identities and possibilities for belonging.

Identities as spatial

Throughout the seven resources, identity within the curriculum is reflected as having a spatial construction. This discourse is particularly relevant with respect to national identity, as identity is often discursively constructed concerning space, land or geography. Grossberg (1996) makes the point that the logic of temporality is often favoured or privileged in ideas around and over identity, but we should also consider the logic of spatiality in identity. How this discourse is constructed differs throughout 'spaces', and examples of such spaces are schools, local communities, counties, countries, nations and the world. The most prominent of these is the relation to the national space, i.e. Wales and the Welsh geographies and landscapes. In some texts in particular we are offered a strong emphasis on identity being constructed within a Welsh landscape. For example, in the *Education in Wales is Changing* video, there is strong imagery depicting valleys and small coastal villages (2019). The speech also reflects this landscape, speaking of "the cottages and houses, the villages and towns, the streets and the communities, this is our common ground" (Education Wales, 2019). This is perhaps one of the more explicit examples of connecting a national space with identity. The vision of common ground extends beyond physical common space in the spatial discourse to a metaphorical common understanding. Through this discourse, there is a narrative that the conditions and landscapes of these spaces impact our identity, or even have a mysterious and romantic essence that shapes our identity and ability to belong. It is in these imageries that we can begin to see essentialism in such national identity. We are reminded, again, of Brubaker and Cooper (2000,

pp.19–20) negotiating the nation as providing subjects with a physical boundary and ideas of a homogeneous space. Locating identity in a physical space is somewhat convenient, adding to a sense of national pride and physical belonging to Wales. This imagery and reliance on national space physically link identities with the country, perhaps promoting affiliation with, and loyalty to, Wales as a geographical space. Again, we can see how this discourse interacts extensively with previous ones, echoing the sentiment regarding the lack of diverse national identity in the first discourse. It can also be seen, in the final identity, as strategic discourse, as interacting with, and complementing, strategic affiliation with, and loyalty to, the country.

There is a far greater reliance on these intrinsic and essentialist spaces and geographies within the visual resources analysed. As mentioned above, we see pictures of landscapes and architecture. Although this romantic spatial imagery is offered in the videos most strongly, a similar idea is offered in the formal texts. This construction is presented most strongly in the written resources through the theme of *cynefin*.² The new curriculum guidance has decided to use the word *cynefin* to denote the local, national and international contexts' cross-curricular theme. The guidance states that learners should be encouraged to “develop an authentic sense of *cynefin*, building knowledge of different cultures and histories, allowing them to develop a strong sense of individual identity and an understanding of how this is connected to and shaped by wider influences” (Education Wales, 2020). *Cynefin*, as a noun, can be translated to ‘habitat’, but others have argued that it has no direct translation or equivalent in English and it has a greater or wider meaning than this (Snowden, 2011). Sinclair argues that it should not be considered a scientific term, and that it instead “describes [a] relationship: the place of your birth and your upbringing, the environment in which you live and to which you are naturally acclimatised” (1998). The new curriculum defines *cynefin* as “The place where we feel we belong, where the people and landscape around us are familiar, and the sights and sounds are reassuringly recognisable” (Education Wales, 2020). *Cynefin* brings up direct and interesting debates relating to a spatial discourse within the curriculum. Considering the word in multiple meanings can translate to different interpretations of identity and belonging in the new curriculum. If we consider *cynefin* as a noun, then *cynefin* is static and has a physical relationship with the learner. As suggested in the definition above, *cynefin* can include a physical landscape and tangible feelings of taste and touch. Taking *cynefin* as the noun meaning habitat and thus “the

natural environment in which an animal or plant usually lives” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022) suggests that learners in Wales, under the new curriculum, have a ‘natural’ habitat, where there will be certain conditions to allow learners to ‘thrive’. This imagery suggests a static and fixed environment, where organisms will not survive if they cannot adapt to the said environment. In this take on *cynefin*, the habitat is fixed and does not necessarily adapt to support the learners. Concerning Willig’s fourth step, it positions the learners’ identity as contingent upon space and, with reliance on imagery and wording from Wales, this space seems to be encouraged as being a Welsh geography or landscape. If learners cannot see themselves within the space, climate or landscape, or take comfort in the tastes and smells they experience, they may feel that they do not belong in this particular *cynefin*. Even the use of a Welsh language term in an otherwise English medium text suggests that the expected or hoped-for outcome is a *cynefin* which lends itself more to a Welsh space or geography. It is also interesting to think that this interpretation of *cynefin* somewhat contradicts, and is not harmonious with, both the fluid and diverse discourses of identity, as explored previously. In the same way, Trudeau (2006, p.423) suggests that belonging is inherently spatial and landscapes carry connotations of exclusion and inclusion to belonging. The flexibility and freedom that this new curriculum brings for schools to choose what they teach could be problematic when considering the potential essentialist interpretation of *cynefin* in this way. Encouraging schools to focus on their local history and demography brings about the possibility that the ideas of *cynefin* will be followed, and such ideas have the potential to be exclusionary and alienating for some. Newton states that devolution of the curriculum and making education more ‘local’, through taking local ownership, will “enhance the responsiveness of schools to local and national needs” (2020, p.215), but doing so could also lead to overuse of, and over-reliance on, the local and national. This may in turn give rise to a favouring of the ideas of the first conceptualisation of *cynefin* and might attach space to identities, thus not allowing for diversity or difference to be seen or explored by all schools and communities. I share this concern with the the 2021 final report (Williams et al., 2021, p.10) that “The interpretation of ‘*cynefin*’ as a core concept of the new curriculum can be limiting and exclusionary if related simply to localities and local demography”.

On the other hand, we are encouraged to consider *cynefin* as a metaphorically-built relationship rather than a physical ‘natural’ attachment to space. This interpretation refutes an essentialist spatial discourse, not necessarily

attaching a place to identity and belonging. Within a built relationship we can consider *cynefin* to be adaptable, multiple and not fixed to space or time. This view puts learners in a different subject position. There is not only the potential for learners' needs to be met by one climate or landscape, but also the potential for building a relationship with multiple 'forms' of *cynefin*. This also does not presume that a learner's *cynefin* is local or national geography; indeed, it could be a feeling with people, place or time. It is perhaps also important not to consider these ideas of *cynefin* as completely separate interpretations, but as a continuum with multiple and varying interpretations possible. A connection here can be made with Massey's reminder that "places can be conceptualised as processes, too" (1991, p.275). There may be relationships and movement within a bound place, which brings together the two interpretations of this spatial discourse somewhat.

The spatial discourse has two extremes in which it can be embodied, of course not always taken at the extremities. The first results in a fixed and exclusive take on belonging, and the second in a fluidity seen in the previous discourse. We can see that the potential for belonging looks different depending on which take on this discourse is favoured. The language and understanding of the concept of *cynefin* will form the subject position and offer different potentials. One has the potential to welcome and allow belonging for all, and the other has alienating features, such as territorial and essentialist views of belonging.

Identities as strategic

Mentioned briefly within other discourses, identity can be located within the resources as a strategy, built and adapted for individual and societal benefit, aims and goals. This discourse gives a use for national identity and shows a discourse of how the curriculum can construct and utilise certain identities as a valuable individual and societal commodity. Considering schools as locations for the influence of competing social agendas, we can see how discourses around identity can be used as a strategy to meet these agendas.

Examples of differences in this discourse are constructed through which 'ideal identity', and for what 'purpose', is imagined at the time. The first way in which this discourse is constructed is to belong at a personal level. At a micro level, identity is used as a key concept in individual belonging and self. For example, it is written that "An appreciation of identity,

heritage and *cynefin* can influence learners emotionally and spiritually, and help build their sense of self and of belonging” (Welsh Government, 2020, p.101). The curriculum constructs identity building and promotes a clear sense of identity as beneficial and strategically useful to the individual. Secondly, we can see this construction as strategic for identities’ societal and communal goals. The narrative is built that a strong self-identity and understanding of identity will lead to concepts such as national pride, social cohesion, national achievement and the combatting of inequalities (Williams et al., 2021). The construction of the curriculum builds national identity as a strategic tool; it is suggested that learners’ understanding of their own identities “can shape the communities in which they live”, whilst also making them realise that they “individually and collectively, can have major impacts on society” (Welsh Government, 2020, p.101). Finally, at a macro level, there is also a wider global element to this strategic discourse. It is proposed that learning about identity and a strong sense of self can help learners “develop an understanding of their responsibilities as citizens of Wales and the wider interconnected world” (Welsh Government, 2020, p.101). We are offered the idea that national identity can be strategic in reaching positive global citizenship, and the curriculum reflects the importance of learners having identities and responsibilities which lead to these goals.

It is useful for the curriculum to construct identities in this way, as it allows learners to interact with their identities and find answers within themselves to the questions which our global societies face. It also gives a purpose for developing such a focus on national identity in the curriculum. In an answer similar to that found for the second discourse of fluid identity, this discourse positions identity as changeably constructed. If identity can be used to reach goals, it infers there must be ways in which we can adapt identities and perceptions of identities to achieve those goals. In some ways, this refutes the inherent take on identity and instead relies on conditions and societies to shape and construct. This positions learners as being able to adapt their identities to fix and address personal, local and global issues, whether that is intended by the individual or not. In practice, it places importance on identity and identity building, through the curriculum. This means that the curriculum can use learners’ identities as tools for strategic gain and the curriculum can pose a particular version of identity to reflect the needs of the individual, the locality, the nation or the world. Viewing identity within a strategic discourse allows us to see identity building as contributing to potential political, national or societal aims

or gains; subjects' identities can be moulded and adapted so that they are in line with these aims and goals. There are some parallels to be found between this discourse and that of Anderson's seminal work (1983). There is a sense of union found in a national community or as he put it a "imagined political community" (Anderson, 1983, p.5). Although not all people in Wales will know or meet one another, there exists a "image of their communion" (Anderson, 1983, p.6) or namely, an Imagined Community. Such construction allows members who feel part of such community to feel and act as if there is a comradeship between each member of the nation, building loyalty and affiliation.

Finally, the consequences of such a discourse take the onus away from the individual and give the responsibility to the curriculum and the government in shaping and allowing identities to belong, or not. This again reminds us of the importance, then, of thinking deeply about what a curriculum can 'do' in society and for whom. Through the politicisation of national identities, the consequences of this discourse mean that identities can be shaped and granted for strategic gain. We can see how a Welsh national identity and sense of belonging can be institutionalised and harnessed for specific reasons. A sense of belonging and national identity, in this respect, can be seen as a 'societal product' rather than a personal endeavour. Although this discourse takes away individual autonomy over identity and belonging, it does, however, reject, somewhat, the essentialist view of identity, for the curriculum can be seen as able to adapt and change subjects' identity construction and belonging.

Conclusions

Through FDA, this work has found, and explored, four prominent discourses of national identity in the formation of the new curriculum. These discourses are, but not limited to, identity as: diverse; fluid; spatial; and strategic. We saw how varying takes on discourses of identity offered differing subject positions for learners and differing potentials for their embodied sense of national identity and belonging. The article considered belonging, or the ability to belong, as being able to be regulated by the construction of national identity discursively created by the curriculum. This work posits that the new curriculum has the potential to include and reflect multiple identities and the potential for belonging, but that it also contains potentially alienating elements such as the topic of *cynefin*, which

could pose barriers to national identity and belonging, where issues of alienation and isolation have been raised as concerns. This work comes to realise the complex strands of identity and belonging; indeed, as Crowley (1999, p.22) notes, belonging and identity are ‘thick’ concepts whose complexity and intersectionality must always be acknowledged. More work could certainly be carried out in this area to address such complexity.

This begs the question, therefore, of what practical changes or suggestions can be made to address this political task and alter the course of these discourses to allow for identities and belonging to develop for all learners in Wales. In talking about Foucault’s approach to ‘suggestions’, or stance on guidance, Flyvbjerg (1998, p.224) describes Foucault as not wanting to prescribe how individuals or institutions should bring about change or think, but rather ‘recommend a focus on conflict and power relations as the most effective point of departure for the fight against domination’ (p.224). It was not the sole or direct intention or purpose of this paper to offer such practical suggestions, but thinking in tune with Foucault, the suggestions that this work can make are aimed more at encouraging the kind of inquiry that exposes such thinking in curriculum planning and schooling. The current project has questioned existing and sometimes taken-for-granted concepts, putting “conventional discursive procedures under erasure” (Lather, 1993, p.686). Not assuming or accepting taken-for-granted ‘truths’, looking for what has been omitted as much as what is there, and acknowledging the messiness and contradictions are all elements that can be taken forward to promote this way of thinking in the future building and planning of the curriculum. I suggest that these cornerstones should be used particularly when thinking about, and considering, teaching, curriculum content, representation, and especially the task of tackling the concept of *cynefin* in schools.

Williams too, poignantly shares a concern over the term *cynefin*, stating that “it must be of concern that this concept may encourage an interpretation of belonging associated with roots rather than routes to Welsh citizenship” (2021, p.53). It is with the same sentiment that this work has aimed to address the relationship between the curriculum and national identity, shedding light on concepts which, as Williams rightly expresses, can serve “ideas of us and them, locals and others, in which the claims of some are seen as more authentic than others” (2021, p.53). It is hoped that, through such analysis of ideas, we can begin to see how sometimes-taken-for-granted ideas such as national identity, and their discursive constructions, can serve to alienate and divide as well as unite. These ideas and

conversations need to be handled with care, nuance and consideration. Un-messy and strictly defined takes on national identity and belonging have the potential to result in alienation and isolation, contradicting the inclusivity goals of the new curriculum. The freedom schools will have to define their curriculum and content is a prime opportunity for this to happen; such ways of thinking should not only be followed by policy-makers, but also schools and students themselves. Identity and belonging are two ideas that have the potential to be re-defined and explored in the new curriculum, but for this to happen critical engagement of policy with schools will be needed.

Notes

- 1 Y Curriculum Cymreig: The distinctive Welsh statutory requirement of the previous curriculum and ethos in schools to “help pupils to understand and celebrate the distinctive quality of living and learning in Wales in the twenty-first century, to identify their own sense of Welshness and to feel a heightened sense of belonging to their local community and country” (ACCAC, 2003, p.2).
- 2 Cynefin: Directly translated into English as habitat, but the curriculum definition is taken into account, specifically “The place where we feel we belong, where the people and landscape around us are familiar, and the sights and sounds are reassuringly recognisable” (Education Wales, 2020).

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