From Cynefin to Cymru and beyond – debating the Curriculum for Wales and locating nation

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ABSTRACT

This review article considers curriculum reform and implementation in Wales and its relationship with national identity and identities. The Curriculum for Wales is perhaps the most significant development in Welsh educational policy since devolution, and the centrepiece of the most recent set of policy reforms which began around 2016. As such, it has been much studied, debated and theorised in recent years, with a great deal of the discussion focussing on its technical aspects, such as learner competence and progression, assessment, and its approach to the defining and integrating subject areas. Also prominent in recent debates has been discussion of more ideological questions around teacher agency, its emancipatory potential as regards teacher professionality, and its relationship to the wider ecology of educational accountability around it. Yet, discussion on the significance of the Curriculum for Wales in reflecting the diverse identities of contemporary Wales has perhaps been a more recent phenomenon, and commentators and researchers have only just begun to grapple with the potential impact that the curriculum will have on Wales's sense of its itself, and how the concept of Cynefin will be deployed as the principal vehicle for engagement with place, community and identities. This paper outlines the wider debates referenced above, before offering further reflection on the position of 'nation' in the Curriculum. It goes on to consider how sub-state nations, such as Wales, who have gained control of their curricula, produce and reproduce their specific 'nationhood' and complex national identities (historical, contemporary and emergent).

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Introduction

Historical accounts of educational reform have a way of reminding us – sometimes gently, sometimes quite pointedly and even reproachfully – that the shifts and upheavals we experience in our contemporary context need to be viewed within a wider arc, and that the preoccupations we regard as unique to the moment, can also echo historical debates. In their authoritative and forensic account of the history of Welsh education, Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon Wynne Roderick remind us how the implementation of a common National Curriculum in 1988 was, historically, an extraordinary development. They note that the extent of standardisation and prescription of curriculum content, and the intensification in watchful accountability which it brought about, were in fact without historical precedent (Jones and Roderick, 2003, 209). And they outline how the seismic shift towards a common, standardised curriculum prompted reflection, discussion and no little contested debate in Wales on the economic, social, cultural and scientific functions and affordances of a curriculum in society, and the wider impact of curriculum reform on the delicate ecology of governance, assessment, accountability, and teacher professionality. Some 35 years after the events described by Jones and Roderick, Wales is again deeply engaged in an equally far-reaching programme of educational reform which arguably began around 2016, just prior to the publication of the 'national mission' in 2017 (Welsh Government, 2017), and whose outcomes may take years to fully mature and be captured. Of the many areas of activity outlined in the national mission, it is the development and implementation of the reform centrepiece – the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) – that constitutes the most fundamental and profound change, and has understandably been a key preoccupation of educational research and commentary in Wales in recent years.

The perennial questions which arise during periods of far-reaching curriculum reform, including those which Jones and Roderick discussed, have by now been well examined as regards the Curriculum for Wales: researchers and commentators in Wales, or with an interest in Wales, have reflected on the place of the CfW within Wales's educational landscape and how its ambitious purposes, intentions and principles will find form at the level of practice (Hizli Alkan and Priestley, 2018;

Gatley, 2020; Sinema et al., 2020; Aldous et al., 2022). The significance of the CfW has been well-analysed within the wider trajectory of the far-reaching and ongoing policy reform process described above (Davies et al., 2018; OECD, 2020; Taylor and Power, 2020; Milton et al., 2023). Much of this debate and commentary has focussed on the extent to which the CfW reflects prevailing principles and recent international orthodoxies of curriculum development, and examined the technical challenges of curriculum making, implementation, assessment, and alignment with the new qualifications under development (Titley et al., 2020; Hughes et al., 2021; Robinson, 2022; Thomas et al., 2023; Morrison-Love et al., 2023). These discussions, I would argue, have tended to focus on examining and critiquing three broad and interlinked narratives of curriculum reform: firstly, consideration of the CfW as a *curriculum of competence,* based on statements of curricular purpose and leaner outcome, rather than based on a common core of knowledge; secondly, the extent to which the curriculum is a *cohesive curriculum* and sufficiently aligned to achieve its stated purposes (Gatley, 2020); and finally, if it is indeed an *emancipatory curriculum* with the potential for re-professionalisation and revitalisation of the teaching workforce. Each of these debates are summarised in some detail below.

A Curriculum of Competence?

The influence of the global education reform movement has powerfully impacted one particular strand of debate around the CfW, by positioning educational purpose and learner outcomes as the guiding principles upon which curricula are developed and reified through delivery. Shapira and Priestley (2018) have identified an increasing international 'genericism' in contemporary curriculum design, characterised by a focus on learner competences and outcomes, as well as active pedagogies. And, the OECD's most recent analysis of Wales' progress positions the conceptualisation and development of the CfW within such an international context: it notes that curriculum reform efforts in Australia, Ontario, British Columbia, Estonia, Finland, Japan and New Zealand have too been guided by a similar emphasis on enshrining, as central considerations, the competences and skills that learners require to fulfil their potential (personal, academic and professional) (OECD, 2020). The CfW is, of course, guided by its four central statements of purpose, which are intended to provide a central reference point for

everything else that follows, in terms of curriculum development, delivery and pedagogy. Hizli Alkan and Priestley (2018) have noted that this 'purpose-led' emphasis partly distinguishes the CfW from its nearest relative, the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in Scotland, which, they argue prescribes and codifies learner outcomes to a greater degree. Whilst this is undeniably true at the level of its Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE), the CfW does still conform to the general international trend outlined above when we drill down into its detail. Each AoLE is defined through broad, deliberately under-prescribed 'Statements of What Matters' and 'Principles of Progression'. These are then underpinned by more specific 'Descriptions of Learning' and 'Progression Steps' which offer more focussed statements of learner outcomes across disciplinary domains, and at various stages of progression.

Yet, crucially, these statements do not mandate particular curricular content, and perhaps the principal debate in this area has been over how the CfW can still be a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum whilst being competence- or skills-based. Priestley and Sinnema (2014, 182) discuss a number of international examples, considering in each case the extent to which knowledge has allegedly been 'downgraded' or deprioritised at the expense of pedagogy and competence-based learner outcomes. The CfW documentation does, however, stress the need for a knowledge-rich curriculum, but does not over-prescribe what that knowledge should be, only the learner competences and outcomes it is intended to support. Indeed, in the original vision statement for the curriculum, Donaldson (2015, 36) gave short shrift to arguments alleging that the new curriculum proposals represented a decoupling of skills and knowledge, terming this an 'unhelpful polarisation'. But, such (mis) conceptions do seem to have been sufficiently prevalent at one point for a 'myth-buster' to be published on the Welsh Government's Education Wales Blog addressing these and other claims about the CfW (Kent, Hagendyk and Davies, 2019). The line of counter argument against such accusations of deprioritising knowledge therefore runs that, although the CfW may not be 'content-led' (Sinnema et al., 2020, 182), this does not make it inevitably knowledge-poor at point of practice and realisation. Yet, success in making the CfW a knowledge-rich curriculum would, however, seem to be highly contingent on the collective capacity and curricular knowledge of schools and professional communities of teachers (Power et al., 2020; Johnes, 2020), and the debate over the risk for inequality posed by this is discussed below.

During the development of the CfW, a prevalent and powerful justification for the move towards such a modern, less prescriptive, outcome-based system was that such a curriculum would offer instrumental economic affordances in supporting national 'competitiveness' (Sinnema et al., 2020: 182), a point also made by Smith (2018) in the context of Scotland. This drew upon the well-rehearsed argument that a post-industrial, digital, globalised economy requires a workforce with transferable skills and competences, such as creativity, flexibility, problem-solving skills and resourcefulness. Indeed, *Successful Futures* noted that the needs of employers should be vital to the development of the curriculum, and articulated their concerns over STEM subjects, and the centrality of digital, and technological competence to the work of the present and future (Donaldson, 2015, 6–7); it noted that globalisation has transformed the workplace (ibid., 10); it stressed the importance of digital technologies in researching and problem solving (ibid.,15); it argued the need for the curriculum to support teamwork (ibid., 70) and to develop both 'hard' and 'soft' workplace skills (ibid., 115). My purpose here is not to position the CfW within the wider well-established corpus of work offering a critique of neo-liberalisation of educational purpose and outcome (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). My intention is to trace and summarise the parameters of the discussion to date, and register the fact that the debates over purpose, competence, outcome and instrumentality are by now well-established and explicit in Wales, and will remain current as implementation of the CfW gains momentum, and the development of 'Made for Wales' qualifications gathers pace (Qualifications Wales, 2023).

A Cohesive curriculum?

The second locus of analysis and critique has focused on issues of content, structure, alignment and assessment. It has examined the implications of working within the relatively broad and lightly-prescribed parameters for subject- and AoLE-specific curriculum content, and considered how purpose-led and teacher-generated curricula are operationalised into coherent units of study. It has also examined how the CfW guidance on progression is understood, and has probed the relationship between a teacher-generated, locally-contextual curriculum and qualification reform at national level.

One of the more lively and contested areas of debate has been around the organisation of the CfW, and how this has been mediated by policymakers, and understood by stakeholders and practitioners, referencing familiar debates around how curricula are conceived, codified, understood, delivered, received and activated by learners. Such discussions echo Stenhouse's (1975) classic contention that the curriculum is a negotiation between intention and reality, and that curricula and their cohesion can be evaluated on the extent to which ideas and aspirations can be operationalised and reified in practice. Critics of the new curriculum in Wales have probed the extent to which the CfW's transformative vision can be realised in practice (Mackie, 2019), pointing to an alleged disconnect between the levels of the rhetorical curriculum, the formal curriculum, the curriculum in use and the received curriculum (Labaree, 1999, cited in Mackie, 2019). The extent to which the organisation of the curriculum into AoLEs purposefully supports inter-subject learning has also received some attention, with some teachers' accounts articulating anxiety and uncertainty about the integrity of traditional curricular subjects as discrete units (Titley et al., 2020; Robinson, 2022).

Newton (2020) has also examined the extent to which the principle of subsidiary – broadly defined here as delegating responsibility for the curriculum to the level closest to the learner – is implicit in both the rationale and design of the CfW. Such an ethos of subsidiarity is clearly designed to be more responsive to local need and to enable teachers to provide authentic, relevant learning experiences (Chapman, 2020). Indeed, Donaldson (2015: 67) argued explicitly that the new curriculum should offer teachers freedom, and, as noted above, the resultant 'What matters' and 'Principles of Progression' statements are deliberately under-prescribed, purporting to offer a delicate balance between providing clarity and consistency around progression, but also affording teacher agency and significant curricular freedom. However, the extent to which a locally-driven CfW could lead to inequality of experience and outcome is considered critically by Power et al. (2020) who also note the salience of privileged forms of curricular knowledge to debates over educational inequalities. And, Titley et al. (2020) interrogate the extent to which a teacher-led, locally-driven CfW can be a compatible precursor to GCSE qualifications which are necessarily standardised and consistent as national awards (both present and in their new iteration from 2025).

An Emancipatory Curriculum?

The third and final broad focus of argument has sought to position CfW within classic debates about teacher professionality and de-professionalisation (Ball, 2003, 2015; Hoyle and Wallace, 2005; Evetts, 2010), and explored the emancipatory potential for re-professionalisation purportedly vested in teacher-generated curricula. Sinema et al. (2020: 183) summarise some of the affordances of teacher-led curricula, noting evidence that an intelligent combination of both autonomy and accountability tends to be associated with better learner outcomes. However, echoing Power et al. (2020), they also note valid concerns over variability and (in)equality, and make the point that it is often assumed that the capacity for curriculum making and realisation within schools is a 'given'. In this respect, it is worth reflecting on the fact that in a context such as Wales, foundational curriculum making has not been a core, mandated professional competence, or necessarily part of teacher education programmes until fairly recently. And, Hizli Alkan and Priestley (2019) argue that, even during such periods of ambitious reform, teachers can continue with older curricular habits, in the absence of clear guidance. This point is echoed by Johnes (2020), who argues that teachers may not possess specific curricular knowledge relating to Welsh history, and may, given a flexible curriculum, perfectly understandably, be likely to teach the material that they know well and feel confident in teaching.

Hughes and Lewis (2020, 292) also remind us that teacher agency and autonomy are 'situated' capacities, and variously facilitated, or confined, by the accountability ecology which surround them. They note the clear potential for the CfW to offer teachers and schools greater control and agency in curriculum and decision making, but do caution that teachers in Wales have been habitually used to high-stakes accountability, intensive scrutiny, and rapid policy change. Similarly, Titley et al. (2020) also warn, in their study, that some teachers found it difficult to imagine a system which fully decoupled assessment from high-stakes accountability. They also speculate, in line with observations made in Scotland by Priestley and Minty (2013), that some schools and teachers may be wary of investing themselves in the ethos of the CfW until the attendant qualification reforms are complete. And, they consider the potential for a performativity backwash into the CfW once the qualifications are finalised – debates that are again familiar in Scotland (Priestley and Shapira, 2023). These potential outcomes are, they argue, a consequence of the historical

importance of attainment levels in external assessments as a visible accountability measure. OECD (2020) have offered a slightly more positive analysis of the re-professionalisation debate in the context of the Welsh reform journey, noting in 2020 that, 'Wales initiated a shift from what had become a managerial education system to one based on trust and professionalism'. Whilst it is undeniable that Wales continues to move in this direction, such a profound reorientation and the resultant culture shift does seem far from complete. The analyses cited above suggest that more work will need to be done to assure teachers and schools that accountability and autonomy can be good neighbours, sharing the same sphere in a proportionate and complementary manner.

Curriculum for Wales – a Welsh Curriculum?

Whilst educational researchers and commentators have, with understandable urgency of purpose, concerned themselves with the key questions outlined above, there has been a parallel set of debates, perhaps proceeding at a slower pace, on the extent to which the CfW will reflect the diverse national identities and histories of Wales (Evans, 2022; Williams et al., 2021; Williams, 2022; Johnes, 2020; Roberts, 2023): questions which are discussed below. Less prominent to date, however, has been academic or policy analysis of the very significance of curriculum control, and how CfW will influence the reproduction of Welsh national identity, identities and citizenship going forward. As a sub-state nation, within a multi-faceted, but asymmetrically balanced nation state, Wales will for the first time exercise unchecked control over a curriculum of its own, with the implementation of the CfW. The implications of this on Wales's sense of its own identity are potentially profound, yet glaringly under-studied and untheorised. International comparisons to date have tended to concern themselves with the more technical lines of debate outlined above, and not yet considered the relationship between sub-state nationhood and curriculum control, and its impact on future notions of identity and citizenship. Perhaps the reason for the dearth of such analysis in Wales to date lies in the way in which such shifts are experienced and practised in real time, and only fully understood from a safe distance in the future. Or, perhaps unpacking the potential permutations of this shift now, risks unpicking a carefully-negotiated and unspoken compromise about the future direction of citizenship and

identity in Wales. Yet, either way, we may be at risk of prioritising the journey and worrying about the destination later. Or conversely, have we reached a stage of post-devolution nation building where collectively-agreed notions of Welsh identity are becoming sufficiently 'banal' (Billig, 1995)? That is, that they are now unselfconsciously (re-)produced in the various spheres of our local and national lives (Thompson and Day, 1999, 28), that our banal daily practicing of identity makes such explicit discussions unnecessary? None of the arguments above seems to offer all of the answer, even if there is, perhaps, something in each.

Yet again, historical accounts of Welsh educational policy remind us that there is little under the sun that is new: thirty years ago, moves to agitate for a curriculum that was more tailored to the needs of Wales, prompted debate over how such developments might affect conceptions of nationhood and identities. Jones and Roderick (2003, 211) trace how the then Curriculum Council for Wales had set up a working group to examine how the language, culture and history of Wales could be expressed via the National Curriculum. They describe how, even within that era of unprecedented centralisation, Wales was, by turns, able assert its difference, and was eventually afforded some level of control over the curriculum, with the implementation of the statutory Cwricwlwm Cymreig in 1995. The situation which prevailed throughout the first two decades of devolution subsequently saw a delicately balanced settlement on the curriculum, with two statutory curriculum instruments, or as Jones et al. (2013, 3) put it, 'while other countries simply have one national curriculum, Wales has a statutory national curriculum and an additional document which is also statutory'. If this settlement represented an accurate motif for a prevailing Welsh identity at the time - a British curriculum, with a supplementary, 'marked' acknowledgement of Welsh difference - how do we now begin to contextualise the significance of the CfW in this regard?

Nation, State and Curriculum

Much of the literature that has explored the connection between the curriculum and the nation has tended to focus on the nation state as the key denominator of analysis, and proceeded to examine its role in the making of the education system, and of education in (re-)producing the nation state. Indeed, Green (1990, cited in Smith, 2018, 31) argues that the education system is both 'parent and the child to the

nation state', articulating elegantly this reciprocally generative relationship. And, Lawton (1975) reminds us that the curriculum can be understood as a carefully curated selection from culture: a set of sanctioned or celebrated cultural, artistic, technical and scientific artefacts of knowledge which, we may add, help both to reflect and in turn reproduce the forms of identity (social, linguistic, ethnic, national) that constitute the nation state, or are useful to it. As Ian Grosvenor has noted, invoking the work of Homi Bhabha (1988), 'at any one moment a nation can be caught, uncertainly, in the act of composing its […] image' (Grosvenor, 1999, 244).

Such analysis, then, is easier (although of course not entirely uncomplicated) in contexts where there is a consistent and corresponding relationship between the nation and the state: where these are, to all intents and purposes, the same thing. In the thought-provoking introduction to his excellent volume *A History of Wales in Twelve Poems,* M. Wynn Thomas reflects back on the strenuous and determined effort that has historically been required of sub-state nations lacking civic institutions, or control over them, in making, maintaining and reinventing their identities. He writes: 'Devoid of the robust supporting mechanism of established state and lacking the complex infrastructure […] the Welsh have had no choice but to exist but by effortfully *choosing* to do so and by constantly improvising strategies of self-renewal' (Thomas, 2021, xiii). On this theme, contemporary analyses have turned to examining, in a post-devolution context, the ways in which Wales is now engaged in using the relatively new policy mechanisms at its disposal to remake its identity: Moon (2012) has characterised the very early phases of devolution as being a policy laboratory where the art of the possible was constantly undergoing exploration. And, Evans (2022, 223–30) has recently considered critically the extent to which, post-devolution, Wales is now engaged in a new chapter of self-renewal through such civic instruments and infrastructure, and is actively exploring the contours of its policy reach as an emergent or developmental civic polity. Such developmental civic nationalism is perhaps expressed explicitly one of the CfW's four purposes, which is to support learners to be 'Ethical and Informed Citizens of Wales and the World'. The use of 'citizen' could be read as an acknowledgement of the increased affiliation with Welshness as a civic identity that has been observed post-devolution (Bradbury and Andrews, 2010), or even as an appropriation of the vocabulary of the nation-state. Whatever, in gaining full control and oversight of its curriculum, Wales for its own part is entering educationally (and therefore historically and culturally) uncharted territory.

Returning to Lawton (1975), Wales is therefore engaged in a process of making its own selections from culture, and composing its own image as a nation (Grosvenor 1999, 244), but is doing so via a teacher-led curriculum which employs Cynefin as a local entry point, rather than via a curriculum that is centrally mandated. As noted above, in doing so it will be the facilitating the local production of national identity (Thompson et al., 1999), an ethos which will both offer affordances and pose risks, which are explored fully below.

There are, of course, a number of precedents and parallels in other jurisdictions and cognate contexts, which are recent and close-to-home, where sub-state nations have gained control over their curriculum to varying degrees. Resultantly, there is a small corpus of work which has sought to make sense of such changes in the expression and reproduction of national identities, although much of this work has tended to focus on the teaching of History, which is often a site of conflict over the precedence of one 'collective memory' of the nation over another (Nora, 1989, cited in Smith, 2019, 442). Scotland is, of course, the example closest to home, with the most immediately comparable parallels. In his analysis of History as a subject within the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), Smith (2018) interrogates the discourses of civic nationalism prevalent in the debate preceding its implementation and since. He points to the CfE occurring at a point of convergence between two powerful trends, one internally-facing, arising from a renewed sense of national confidence and self-belief following the establishment of the Scottish Parliament; and the other externally-driven supranational trend towards curricula which foreground economic instrumentality and national competitiveness (similar to part of the debate outlined above in the Welsh context). His analysis concludes that the History curriculum within the CfE now reflects (and, we may add, endeavours to reproduce) widespread notions about how the Scottish nation sees itself and aspires to be: promoting a confident and inclusive civic national identity, whilst foregrounding employability and responsible citizenship (ibid., 40). Slightly further afield, in the context of what they term the Flemish 'subnation' in Belgium, Van Havere et al. (2017, 272) have examined young people's understandings of historical narratives. They first offer a critical appraisal of the Flemish History curriculum, or 'standards', which are autonomously organised by the sub-state Flemish government. They characterise the History standards as generic, outcome-focussed and lightly-prescribed, noting that they do not specify particular periods or aspects of Belgian or Flemish history that pupils are required to study. They go on to

conclude that the 'subnational past' (ibid., 273) is almost entirely absent from the History standards. Interestingly, their study reports that Flemish students tended not to frame their understanding of history with reference to any 'master narrative of the national or subnational past' (ibid., 273), and instead articulated complex, layered accounts of Belgian and Flemish histories, within which many, even conflicting, interpretations coexist (ibid., 282).

This debate is course not unfamiliar in Wales, with 2020 having seen an intensive public discussion about the proposed inclusion of Welsh history in the new curriculum. A Senedd Committee report the previous year had acknowledged 'frustration from teachers, history societies, pupils and academics that children do not know the story of their community or country' (National Assembly for Wales Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, 2019, 11–12). It described the direction of travel prompted by the development of the CfW as 'moving away from the current British approach to teaching history with Welsh examples tagged on' (ibid., 23). The then Minister of Education, Kirsty Williams, entered the debate by commenting that, 'There is no such thing as Welsh history. There are Welsh histories we need to talk about' (NationCymru, 2020). This was a reasonable and valid observation in a diverse society and post-structuralist world, namely that any national history is made of multiple, competing, often contested, narratives from a range of perspectives, which in turn will have been successively recontextualised through a range of historiographical lenses. Yet, it touched on an area of sensitivity, and the impression received by some commentators, and readily critiqued, was that Wales was somehow uniquely an invalid unit of historical analysis in the curriculum. The 2022 statement on History in the CfW, arising from the Co-operation Agreement between Plaid Cymru and the Labour Welsh Government speaks to this debate and offers a negotiated compromise, emphasising 'the importance of Welsh history – in all of its diversity and complexity – being mandatory in the new Curriculum for Wales' (Welsh Government, 2022). The episode clearly reflected a sensitivity around the issue of history in a sub-state nation whose curriculum has traditionally been a negotiated enterprise between the levels of nation and state.

Furthermore, reflecting on this issue in the context of the wider debates outlined at the start of this paper, the clear tension discernible between the principles of subsidiarity and teacher agency in curriculum making, and considerations of consistency and equality, could well affect constructions of the

nation in the CfW. This concern is outlined by Johnes (2020) who notes that in respect of the CfW that an under-prescribed curriculum, coupled with a lack of a tradition of Welsh history being taught consistently in schools could lead to an incoherent and inequitable picture. He notes that 'Within a curriculum that is very flexible, teachers deliver what they are confident in, what they have resources for, what interests them and what they think pupils will be interested in. Not all history teachers have been taught Welsh history at school or university and they thus perhaps prefer to lean towards those topics they are familiar with.' (Johnes, 2020).

The episode also references debates in other sub-state nations as outlined above, principally Van Havere et al.'s (2017) findings that the Flemish students in their study often lacked any sense of an over-arching Flemish historical narrative, but were also able to articulate complexity and negotiate multi-faceted accounts. This finding – and indeed this debate – would appear to be double-edged: on the one hand, the lack of an over-arching narrative within which to frame one's historical understanding of the nation, may cause concern when we consider a curriculum's function in creating shared civic identities and social cohesion through common narratives and reference points (Smith, 2019). On the other hand, the findings also hold open the intriguing possibility that a multi-faceted, multi-layered national identity, may be a valuable resource in understanding complex and contested perspectives, and being open to the co-existence of multiple historical truths (Smith, 2018). Similar observations to those put forward by Van Havere et al. (2017) are also made by Lévesque (2017) who looks at the perspectives of French Canadian students, and by Sant et al. (2015) in the context of Catalonia. Indeed, Sant et al. (2015) go further, proposing that new national histories be consciously put to humanistic purposes, such as creating social cohesion, whilst acknowledging sites of contestation, and in doing so necessarily becoming inclusive and open to multiple perspectives. Conversely, they warn against sub-state nations repeating the mistakes made by larger, more established nation states in devising their historical narratives and History curricula, arguing the need to avoid creating a self-serving, inauthentic, romantic-patriotic version of the nation. It is early days for the CfW in this respect, but the indications are positive: the duty to include Black and Minority Ethnic histories in the CfW is a hugely significant development, which has enormous potential to decolonise the curriculum, de-essentialise notions of Welsh identity (Scourfield and Davies, 2005) both contemporary and historical, and encourage a balanced, honest and critical engagement with our national pasts.

Furthermore, Sant et al.'s (2015) call is an interesting one and speaks to debates beyond the discipline of history: namely the need for an overarching civic purpose which guides the enterprise that sub-state nations are engaged in, in building curricula that serve their learners and reflect authentically and instructively the identities with which they affiliate. As Smith (2019) argues, the History curriculum in the CfE reflects and projects an aspirational Scotland that is ambitious, confident in its identity and civically inclusive. In supporting the development of citizens of Wales and the world, we will need to look carefully and critically at the alignment of subject content with the local, national and international contexts around them that they are intended to reflect and serve. In addition to discovering and recounting new Welsh histories, this will also mean developing new corpuses of knowledge in other disciplines, new literary and cultural canons, and call for creative work in exemplifying the relevance, contribution and application of scientific and technical knowledge in local, national and international contexts.

Cynefin and Cymru

Another aspect of the CfW, which has attracted some critical analysis, is the salience of Cynefin as the primary lens through which teachers and pupils are expected to engage with place, community, nation, and international dimensions. As Jones et al. (2020) and Williams (2022) note, Cynefin has an interesting history and provenance as a term which makes it an intriguing choice for a curriculum intending to offer open, accessible affiliation with place and nation. Cynefin literally means 'habitat', but in terms of its implicature in use, encompasses a strong sense of belonging to, identification with and affiliation with place and community: indeed, in colloquial conversational usage in Welsh the term has homely, almost 'folksy', overtones. Yet the use of the word as a conceptual academic term is by no means new: Jones et al. (2020) have traced attempts to codify 'Cynefin', back to an early definition posited by the literary academic Bedwyr Lewis Jones in 1985, where he described it as a 'Welshman's first and foremost window on the world'. (Jones, 1985, cited in Jones et al., 2020). Notwithstanding the language of its time, there are aspects to Jones's definition, which are instructive and do speak to our current version of the term, and the rapid evolution it has undergone since it has been co-opted into Welsh curriculum discourse. Jones's use of Cynefin as an orienting,

grounding epistemological position from which – and as a lens through which – engagement with the world can be conducted, is a powerful idea. In its recent iteration then, Cynefin is vested with the hope that learners can use it to affiliate positively with their own identities, and engage, confidently and assuredly, with wider, more complex and potentially more contested aspects of their place, time and identity, and those of others:

> Learners should be grounded in an understanding of the identities, landscapes and histories that come together to form their cynefin. This will not only allow them to develop a strong sense of their own identity and well-being, but to develop an understanding of others' identities and make connections with people, places and histories elsewhere in Wales and across the world (Welsh Government, 2020, 30).

The notion that learners need to feel confident and assured of the validity of their own identity and the value of their own communities, as a basis for engaging positively with those of others is interesting in itself, and brings to mind ideas put forward by some commentators in the field of multicultural education: for example, Parekh's notion of extending 'sympathetic imagination' (Parekh, 2005, 15) to the identities of others within a multicultural society, which he notes may be contingent on feeling supported and secure in one's own identity. And, James Banks (2017, 369) has considered the concept of critical citizenship in multicultural societies, arguing that some sense of positive affiliation with the nation is important for social cohesion, but that it should be tempered with reasoned and reflective critical interrogation of the nature and limits of that affiliation.

To get the best out of Cynefin, we will need to facilitate its rapid evolution. Jones et al. (2020) contend that it has been promoted to its current position at the expense of what they regard as other more useful organising concepts, such as place-based education. And, they note that understandings of the concept of Cynefin have traditionally been based on the assumption of static, stable or geographically delimited communities. Indeed, in his analysis of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig, Smith (2016) noted a tendency for versions of Welsh identity therein to be overly simplistic and uncomplicated by questions of demographic and cultural diversity. To fulfil the substantial and important task now required of it, Cynefin will need to continue to transform, and will need to be suitably flexible as a term to embrace dynamic and changing communities. As argued by Williams (2022), it will need to offer open 'routes' to affiliation and civic belonging, rather than just reflecting traditional 'roots' within a community. Encouragingly, in their

recently-published study, Chapman et al. (2023) note that primary school learners are already deploying the concept of Cynefin to help them make sense of identities and communities with which they affiliate that lie far beyond Wales: they cite accounts by learners whose *cynefinoedd* encompassed Bulgaria, Nigeria and Sri Lanka.

Viewed in the context of the broader debates outlined at the beginning of this paper, it is also useful to ask how Cynefin will fare in balancing the tension between curriculum-making agency and curricular cohesion. Whist it is perhaps too early to make any firm empirical observations, we say that Cynefin does offer significant emancipatory potential for teachers and learners alike. It can afford freedom to explore and engage with localities and communities, offering authentic learning experiences and opportunities to connect local experiences to wider systems and epistemologies (social, economic, political, technical, scientific and so on). Yet, as with the debate about history outlined above, there is also the potential for incoherence and disconnect.

The way in which Cynefin and nation will interact across the CfW is therefore a question worth examining in more detail. As Cynefin becomes deployed as the means through which engagement with other organising concepts, such as national identity and global citizenship, is practised, it is pertinent to consider the likely interplay between these levels, which will both entail risks and affordances. The first potential risk is that Cynefin leads to the development of hyper-local curricula which fail to progress learners' engagement beyond the immediate community, and which do not succeed in using Cynefin as the conduit for making links between the various levels, and dimensions of learners' identities (and those of others). This could well lead to second order risk where the imagined aggregation of the local into the national (Anderson, 1983), or what Thompson et al. (1999: 28) call 'the local production of national identity' fails to occur via Cynefin: that it fails in its remit to connect the local with the national and the international, and to create 'citizens of Wales and the world'. To borrow and elucidate Bedwyr Lewis Jones's metaphor, Cynefin therefore needs to be a window on the whole world, not just the immediately visible. The third risk is the opposing corollary, and implied by the warning issued by Sant et al. (2015) against creating an inauthentic version of the nation via the curriculum. If such a self-conscious, inauthentic construction of the nation, as identified by Smith (2016) in respect of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig, drives the conceptions of Wales and

Welshness put forward in the CfW, Cynefin could in turn become little more than a similarly inauthentic refraction of a predetermined, normative national identity, played out at a local level. Yet encouragingly, as noted above, we do seem to be developing the theoretical tools, and one would hope, the pedagogical vocabulary and practices to avoid such risks.

Aside from risks, there are also potentially transformative opportunities: Cynefin and nation, when they can be brought together to interact authentically through the CfW, do offer the potential of constructing a reciprocally-generative relationship between our community and national identities that enhances both; and furthermore achieves this via a democratic, teacher-led curriculum. The CfW and the attendant qualification reforms offer an unique opportunity to construct and exemplify our local and national identities in an authentic manner, that gives confidence to teachers to engage in curriculum innovation, that gives them licence to look anew at corpuses and canons of disciplinary knowledge, and to challenge the horizons of their own knowledge. Writing in 2003, Jones and Roderick (2003, 232–33) ended their sweeping survey of the history of education in Wales on an optimistic concluding note. They noted the widespread hope at the time that devolution could present an unprecedented opportunity of creating an education system that meets the needs of Wales, of renewing and redefining national identity, and fostering opportunity and equity. They end by concluding that, 'The implications for education and for Wales are immeasurable' (ibid., 233). These words echo pointedly in our current context of the implementation of the CfW, and throw down a similarly pressing challenge.

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