Critical Analysis of Curriculum for Excellence

The curriculum is “all the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school” (Kerr, 1968: 16). Within each curriculum there are a range of ideologies. These are beliefs about “knowledge that should be taught in schools, the inherent nature of children, what school learning consists of, how teachers should instruct children, and how children should be assessed” (Schiro, 2013:1). In Scotland, three of the main schools of thought for education are: scholar academic, social efficiency and learner centred. These theories have all been applied to Curriculum for Excellence and in turn created a varied set of learning processes and aims. This essay will discuss these theories of education and explain why social efficiency has been the most dominant in shaping Curriculum for Excellence.

Within this essay, there will be a focus on two key curricular documents. The first being ‘Building the Curriculum 1: The contribution of curriculum areas’. One of the key aims of this document is “offering parents, employers and others who have an interest in Scottish education an indication of what and how children and young people will learn though the new curriculum” (Scottish Executive, 2006:3). This will therefore identify the intended outcomes for Curriculum for Excellence. The second is ‘Building the curriculum 3: A framework for learning and teaching’. This document “outlines important messages for those involved in planning the curriculum for children and young people” (Scottish Executive, 2008:2). Both these documents will be vital in discussing the ideologies within Curriculum for Excellence.

The scholar academic theory is based on providing pupils with knowledge, which has been organised into disciplines. “This entails introducing children into both the knowledge base of a discipline and the ways in which academicians within the discipline think, feel, and communicate” (Schiro, 2013: 20). Therefore, the main aim is to help students develop an understanding of each domain of learning, giving them the opportunity to progress up the hierarchy of the discipline. This ladder that students could progress through consists with themselves at the bottom, teachers in the middle and ultimately, scholars at the top, who are constantly disseminating new knowledge. The scholar academic theory has an obvious role within curricula, due to the subject curriculum. Student’s study different subjects, such as maths and English, which “preserves the existence and builds knowledge of each discipline” (Schiro, 2013: 42). This could lead them to choose a discipline to study in further education, for example at university.

However, ‘Building the Curriculum 1’ suggests that the role of these disciplines is to ensure “that learning takes place across a broad range of contexts” (Scottish Executive, 2006: 2). This dismisses the scholar academic theory’s role within Curriculum for Excellence because it suggests the subjects are only used to form varied content, which students need to fulfil society’s needs. ‘Building the Curriculum 1’ identifies that Curriculum for Excellence has an “aspiration that all children and young people should be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors” (Scottish Executive, 2006: 1). This highlights that students are being adapted into individuals that will be able to thrive in today’s society, therefore linking to the social efficiency theory. The scholar academic theory lacks real impact on Curriculum for Excellence, because the Scottish curriculum places more emphasis

behavioural change rather than acquiring knowledge. Watson (2010) agrees with this view, as he argues that Curriculum for Excellence's purpose is to adapt student's behaviours and not just provide them with information.

Schiro (2013) states that "social efficiency educators believe curriculum objectives must be stated in behavioural terms" (Schiro, 2013: 58). Once these objectives have been set, "teachers manage instruction by selecting and using educational strategies designed to help learners acquire the behaviours prescribed by their curriculum" (Schiro, 2013:5). This is supported by Alanazi (2010) who identifies that "social efficiency theorists believe that the initial aim of learning is to meet social needs of the society" (Alanazi, 2016: 4). Therefore, it is clear that the purpose is to help students develop skills, which they will need in their future work places and general life. This approach contrasts with the scholar academic theory which placed emphasis on proving students with knowledge, which would lead them to further education. Watson (2010) signifies that this has had a significant impact on Curriculum for Excellence. "CfE is concerned with setting out not what children are expected to know, but how they should be" (Watson, 2010: 99). This links to 'Building the Curriculum 1' which identifies the four capacities which Scottish schools should help students to become: "successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors" (Scottish Executive, 2006: 1). Thus, the focus is not on knowledge, it is on behavioural change. Additionally, 'Building the Curriculum 3' states "the aim of Curriculum for Excellence is to help prepare all young people in Scotland to take their place in a modern society and economy" (Scottish Executive, 2008: 3). Consequently, key components of the social efficiency theory can be seen within Curriculum for Excellence, because it helps students gain life and work skills. Ultimately, Schiro (2013) supports this view through highlighting that the goal of the curriculum for social efficiency theorists "is to train youth in the skills and procedures they will need in the workplace and at home to live productive lives and perpetuate the functioning of society" (Schiro, 2013: 5).

A key aspect of the social efficiency theory is that society's needs should become the curriculum's outcomes. Bobbitt (1918) states that "the abilities, attitudes, habits, appreciations that men need should be objectives of the curriculum" (Bobbitt, 1918: 42). Tyler (1949) supports this by stating "education is a process of changing the behaviour of people…education objectives, then, represent the kinds of changes in behaviour than an educational institution seeks to bring about in its students (Tyler, 1949: 5-6). This allows educational institutions to be able to effectively track progression because students can be judged on if they are meeting outcomes. Therefore, the social efficiency theory has significantly shaped Curriculum for Excellence due to it being based on outcomes for each stage. 'Building the Curriculum 1' highlights that: "experiences and outcomes across the curriculum areas will sum up national aspirations for every young person: the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes we hope they will develop" (Scottish Executive, 2006: 3). The social efficiency theory has played a dominate role in shaping Curriculum for Excellence due to its outcomes being based on national aspirations and thus, preparing students for life after school. Gagne (1965) supports this view by stating "it is this social organisation that must transform the highly dependent young child into the adult who, in his own individual manner, lives a life that is satisfying to himself largely because it contributes to the goals of his society (Gagne, 1965: 237)

However, due to the social efficiency theory meaning Curriculum for Excellence is objectives-led, teachers lack significant autonomy. Schiro (2013) identifies that "terminal objectives are the educational purposes of the curriculum, the ends toward which educators direct their efforts" (Schiro, 2013: 71). This is supported by Alanazi (2016) who states that "unlike learner centred

ideology, social efficiency focuses on teachers helping students to develop skills essential for society needs (Alanazi, 2016: 4). Therefore, teachers have less independence to follow the interests of the students because they may not comply with the curriculum objectives.

Within the learner centred theory, “the needs and interests of learners, rather than those of teachers, principals, school subjects, parents, or politicians, play a major role in determining the school program (Schiro, 2013: 105). This is supported by Rugg and Shumaker (1928) who state that learner centred schools are “child-centred institutions in contrast to the teacher centred and principal centred schools of the traditional order” (Rugg and Shumaker, 1928: 56). This means that teachers are able to follow the student’s interests and are not bound by curriculum objectives made by external sources. Ultimately, “the routine needs of the school, as well as the lesson assignments, the planning of excursions and exhibits, and the criticism of reports are taken over by the pupils” (Rugg and Shumaker, 1928: 57). Therefore, the role of a teacher is to follow the student’s interests, rather than guide them through different disciplines of the scholar academic theory.

‘Building the Curriculum 1’ identifies that “teachers have greater scope and space for professional decisions about what and how they should teach, enabling them to plan creatively within broader parameters” (Scottish Executive, 2006:1).