

INSPIRING WORLD-CLASS
TEACHING PROFESSIONALISM



The ethics of knowledge in curriculum design

Transcript of Provocation by Dr Joe Smith (Intelligent verbatim transcription).

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Hello, everyone, my name is Joe Smith and I'm a lecturer in education at the University of Stirling. I've been asked by the GTCS to provide one of these video provocations for the work around the updating of the Code of Professionalism and Conduct. The topic I've been asked to speak about is a question of professional ethics and more specifically I want to talk to you today about the ethics of knowledge within curriculum design. My overall argument is going to be that the question of what we should teach is at heart an ethical question; an ethical question with which all beginning and experienced teachers should be engaged.

So the crux of my provocation is that I want to say, first of all, a fairly uncontroversial thing I would think; is that the first question that we pose when we think about curriculum design should be that of purpose and what are we educating children for and this is fundamentally an ethical question and secondly I would say that within this ethical question and we're always going to have further questions around content and knowledge selection and what specifically should we teach children what should we expect children to know about the world and these two are ethical questions where it becomes more provocative and more controversial is that I'm going to say that in schools and examinations and in policy these ethical questions have been too often neglected and avoided and I'm going to and instead instrumental considerations have been put in their place and so finally what I'm going to argue is that if teaching is to be an ethical profession this requires a reconnection with educational purpose and so any reaccreditation of the standards should expect teachers to take knowledge seriously to understand the transformative power of knowledge and to hold these as values which they can use to take a critical stance towards education policy.

Before I start, I wanted to issue a very quick apology. I am a trained History teacher and most of my research that I do at Stirling is about History and the History curriculum and so most of my examples are going to be about History. I do that because I would rather speak knowledgeably about something I know something about than to speak vaguely and speculatively about things that I don't. However, I'm aware that what I'm talking about isn't just about history and that the audience for this video are people who aren't History teachers, so I will try to speak about other subjects. I will try to speak about Primary phase and Further Education phase. I can't promise I will get it right and you can see the picture of me sweating talking about these things there. So if I do say things that are oversimplifications or downright inaccurate please put this down to my speaking outside my area of expertise and cut me some slack.

So I want to speak now about in overview about how I think purpose has been lost somewhat in Scottish education in recent years. I think it's helpful to think about the evolution of CfE. If we think about the pre-CfE context if we're going back to the early 2000s I think you have a system there that educationalists would call a 'high input regulation. Low output regulation'. What that means is that the curriculum that existed was very detailed and very specific about what it expected teachers to do. Because it was so detailed and so specific it didn't feel the need to scrutinize outcomes quite as much as if it were less specific. And the question of purpose was decided centrally by curriculum, sorry, the 5 to 14 guidelines or by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. The vision of CfE I would like to say is one of a 'low input regulation, low output regulation' and there's obviously two components to this. One is the low input regulation, which means that CfE sought to liberate teachers, it sought to allow teachers to be curriculum makers, to have agency and to go beyond the narrow confines of policy. And the second dimension of this is that there would be low output regulation. There is no point liberating teachers if you're not also saying that you trust teachers and if you look for purpose in policy at this phase you don't really get much beyond the four capacities. You have the principles and practice documents for each curriculum area but again these are intentionally quite vague. I think what we have now in CfE in 2022 is that we've kept the low input regulation, which was part of the vision of Curriculum for

Excellence, but we now have high output regulation. So in effect what you've got is a curriculum which says to teachers 'we won't tell you what to do but we will measure how your pupils do'.

So if you're looking for purpose in this context, purpose very easily starts to be conflated with outcomes. Look at the kinds of outcomes that we've become accustomed to talking about: closing the attainment gap; positive destinations figures; insight data; the Scottish Nationalised Standard Assessments. All of these things now do not directly constrain or direct teachers work but the implications or rather the effects of these policies and these policy drivers have been to change the way in which teachers relate to curriculum.

But we now live in a landscape where purpose is very diffuse and is spread over lots and lots of different areas of policy. I've given five examples there of policies that talk about purpose and you can add to these learning for sustainability you can add to these and learning for global citizenship. Clearly every single one of these is hugely important. As Biesta says try arguing for an ineffective education there's no one who would argue for negative destinations or an unexcellent curriculum or an unequal curriculum. So these policies then they're very diffuse and they're very difficult to argue with. And at times these policies come into contact with each other and in terms they come into conflict with each other. So at the risk of looking a little bit at the educational jargon around this there's a big gap between rhetoric and reality.

One process that we've seen is what Biesta calls the 'learnerfication of education'. I know that Professor Biesta is somebody who's giving one of these provocations, and so he will obviously be able to speak much more learnedly about this. But the idea has definitely taken root that learning has become an individual, an individualized, concept. That education is capital - it's something that is an individual has to get in the same way as they get financial capital and they have to spend in the same way as they spend financial capital. Related to this has been the rise of a metricised accountability system. And what this means, and again Biesta is very good on this, is that we see accountability being accountability to the system rather than accountability to civil society. There's no harm in accountability. Everybody who works with children should be held accountable. But we would hope that that accountability would be to the children themselves. We would hope that accountability would be to parents. We would hope that that accountability would be to wider society. But instead, accountability is to the system. It is to civil servants. It is to data. It is to league tables. And that's not the kind of accountability that we would like in a democracy.

And the third thing that I think that we've seen, and this is what going to be a major theme of what I talk about today, is a language or a rhetoric which sets skills up in opposition to knowledge. And in this binary, this artificial binary where skills are separated from knowledge, I want to suggest that skills have been privileged somewhat and they are viewed as dynamic, transferable. We have skills for learning, life and work - obviously three very important fields of human endeavour - and in the process, knowledge has been kind of cast as the ugly sister a little bit. Knowledge is innate. Knowledge is localised. Knowledge is positioned as less important. And again, just to say a little bit more about my esteemed colleagues who are giving these other provocations, you can sum this up in a quote from Biesta there where he says 'the measurement of educational 'outcomes' can never replace answering the question of purpose in education' and as I say I'm sure Professor Biesta will talk about that more generally. I'm going to talk about it today with respect to knowledge.

James McEnaney, who's written the excellent book *Class Rules*, he gives us some examples of what happens when educational purposes do start to become a proxy for

purpose. He says that in the system as it is a child who leaves school with a single Higher grade C is equivalent to a child who leaves school at five Highers. In terms of a particular metric. In 2017, James McEnaney pointed out that the Scottish Government admitted that if a student leaves school and takes a zero-hour contract the school can count that as a positive destination for that student. Despite the fact that the First Minister herself had previously said that these zero-hour contracts were not a particularly desirable way to live one's life or make one's living.

Finally we see more quantitative data from Shapira and Priestly, who have demonstrated that schools in more deprived SMID deciles are taking fewer subjects at Nationals and Highers. Why are they doing these things? They're doing these things in the belief that if they narrow the curriculum, if they concentrate on fewer subjects they are more likely to have students succeed in a fewer number of Highers and therefore appear better in metricised accountability mechanisms.

So how does what I want to talk about today fit into the context of what James McEnaney and Gert Biesta are talking about? Well, I want to make the case that learnerfied credentials may not credit what we think they do. In other words, it may not be that we can take a qualification or a credential or an award as evidence that a student can do the things that that reward says they can. I'll say more about that in a second.

The second thing I want to say is that the learnerfication of education is inimical to good curriculum design. If we start to think about outcomes and products we think less about process and we think less about what we are designing into the curriculum. And I want to say most crucially that if we get one and two wrong, which I think we are to an extent at the moment, then this has implications beyond the classroom for civil society.

So I want to say that taking knowledge seriously is part of the solution to the problems I've identified on the last slide. I want to say that knowledge is important, firstly because it introduces children to what already exists in the world but, more importantly, once children understand the world as it is they begin to see new opportunities. They begin to see how they are unique, they begin to see how they can contribute.

What we have at the moment is a system which talks about children being effective contributors but doesn't think about how they need to know about the world as it is, or conceive of the way the world as it is, before they can start making that contribution. We can't afford to ignore this question and we can't afford to pretend that it doesn't matter what we teach children.

So I'm going to and start by unpacking the problem in a little bit more detail. I apologise if this is somewhat blunt or if this is something that teachers are already very intimately familiar with. I think it's important to just unpick a little bit more about what it is we're talking about.

So firstly I want to talk about learnerfication, knowledge and curriculum design. I want to say a little bit about the credentials and awards system that we have here in Scotland. I think it's important to keep apart in our minds the idea of credentials - which is the bit of paper given to us by SQA or a warding bodies that says we can do things - and qualification which is whether we actually can do them. Now in his book *Testing Times*, Stobart helps us to understand this difference by introducing us to a one-handed clock. And he says that assessment can be valid. Now a valid assessment is one that rewards and credits the things that we want. Reliable. A reliable assessment is one that generates trust. A trustworthy mark that allows comparison between people who take it - the assessment. Or thirdly what he calls manageability, which means that the assessment is essentially quick and cheap.

So we can think about an extremely valid assessment as being something like a driving test. A driving test is very valid because you actually have to go and drive the car, and you demonstrate your ability to drive the car by driving a car. We can think of a reliable test as something like a spelling test or a list of the capitals of Europe or a multiplication tables test. We can say with confidence that the person who gets the higher mark knows more than the person who doesn't. And we can think of quick and cheap by comparing the way that we assess driving lessons - we have one assessor and one student - with the way that we assess English Higher or Mathematics National 5 where we have 30 or 40 assessors and several thousand students. Obviously, it is much cheaper to assess National 5 Mathematics than it is to conduct a driving test. And as Stobart says we basically have to pick two of these things and find a balance between them. And my concern is what we have in Scotland at the moment is a credential system, an award system, which emphasises manageability and reliability at the expense of validity. And I'm not completely convinced that the examinations that we've got credit the things that they claim to. I'll say more about this in a second.

We have an award system in which the principle of comparable outcomes is very important and, as this extract from the History National 5 course report says, comparable outcomes come about because it is very difficult to make an exam equally difficult, perfectly equally difficult, from one year to the next. So in order to avoid a situation where huge numbers of children pass or huge numbers of children fail the marks for each year are standardised against previous years' marks.

Now we can see this most clearly in the 2020 SQA grading fiasco which obviously occurred after public examinations were suspended because of covid lockdown and teachers were invited to submit teacher estimates for grades instead. So you can see in this table that under the column 2020 estimates, teachers estimated that 90.5 of their female candidates would get an A to C at Higher. Now, what happened with these teacher estimates? As we know they weren't just accepted by SQA. Instead, SQA applied this infamous algorithm to moderate and correct teachers' assessments as they would see it. What they meant by moderating correct was to keep comparable outcomes to make 2020 comparable with 2019, 2018, 2017, and 2016. Now their argument was, not unreasonably, that it wouldn't be fair on students in other years if we suddenly had a huge surge in the number of passes. Their mechanism for doing this, therefore, was to use historical data to bring 2020 in line with other years. Now, as we know, there are all kinds of reasons why this is iniquitous and there's all kinds of problems thrown up about this, and teachers' grades were eventually accepted. But if we look at what SQA was trying to do it was trying to preserve its system of comparable outcomes it's system in which the number of As, Bs and Cs is, for the want of a better word, rationed and they are parcelled out in proportions that have been historically determined.

And so, when you have a system that prizes comparability of outcomes as much as SQAs does, the key guiding principles in assessments, to go back to Stobart's one-handed clock, are manageability and reliability. Okay, we are not as bothered about whether the test really reflects the change or the learning that has taken place what we want is a test that is reliable that is to say one where we can say child x has got a higher mark than child y and we want a system that is manageable which means reasonably cheap, reasonably efficient to run and reasonably quick getting the results back. What does this mean? Well, it means that you have to: have tests that have got predictable questions; people have to know what the questions will be so we can predict what children will write; we have to have formulaic structures to questions and answers so that we can compare because remember comparability is key; we have to have questions and answers that don't allow markers to

exercise discretion because once you introduce discretion you reduce reliability and comparability. And the result inevitably is teaching to the test or rather teaching to the mark scheme.

I've seen this in my own research. So SQA history examinations say the candidates will develop skills of critically evaluating a variety of views. Now obviously that skill is hugely important, but let's have a look at what it looks like once it's been put through an assessment system which prizes reliability and comparability.

Well, teachers tell us we really drill them on the marking instructions and they will get a better outcome than a really good historian who has their own written voice and doesn't play by the rules of the game so we're not training historians we're training automatons. I get my pupils to colour code their essays. So green for knowledge, orange for analysis, yellow for analysis plus. And you look at their essays and they're all green, yellow, orange, green, yellow, orange, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. So the assessment in history, which is meant to be about all these meaningful skills and knowledges that make human beings better people, are reduced to getting children to meet the demands of the mark screen because they are going to sit assessments that are so rigidly determined to be reliable that there is no scope to do anything slightly different. Children have to say and have to play by the rules of the game.

Now, this is not just true of History. As I said at the start I'm speaking about History because it's the topic that I know best. But in some what we have at the moment is an education system in Scotland which is built on accountability to the system, not accountability to learners. It's about one which generates data not one which thinks best about what children might need to know, understand or be able to do to live in the world. And in this system quick and cheap manageable and comparable reliable assessments win out over meaningful valid ones which are by the nature less easy to compare with each other and more expensive. and crucially this high stakes assessment at certification level what is happening in S4, S5 and S6 washes back into the BGE both into the lower years of high school and into primary and obviously in primary you can see the same wash back effect happening where the Scottish standardised national assessments are washing back into what is being told in classrooms.

So I'm now going to look at the way in which these learnerfication processes that we can see most clearly in the senior phase are affecting education for younger children in theory and policy terms what is happening in the senior phase shouldn't be happening in the BGE while SQA can make the case that they need comparable outcomes and they need reliable assessments in order to guarantee system fairness this is not what should be happening in the BGE. Instead, policy positions teachers as curriculum makers and there's a quote there from building the curriculum three CFE places the responsibility for innovation at the level of the school and allows greater autonomy.

So how are schools using this autonomy currently? This graph is probably going to require some explanation and it's based on a piece of research I did a couple of years ago where basically I went into 20 Scottish high schools and asked them what they taught in their BGE history curriculum. Now in CfE schools have got complete freedom over what to teach in their BGE history. So I took the time to ask them. Each horizontal line represents a school and you can see that there is dates along the bottom and so if there are lots of horizontal lines around a particular date that means lots of schools teach that period if there are fewer horizontal lines around that time then that means fewer schools teach that period. So what do we see when we ask how do you use your autonomy how are schools using the freedom that they are get to choose what to teach in the BGE? Well what we see is that certain topics remain very popular and these are traditional topics that remain popular you can see that lots of schools are teaching the late 13th century so the Scottish Wars of Independence. You

can see that lots of schools are teaching the 20th century the World Wars etc. Obviously my face is covering some of this but you get the impression. And you can see that very few schools are teaching the period in between the period between 1300 and 1700. There's not many horizontal lines there. Not many schools are teaching these periods. Now the nature of BGE is that we can't make any judgments about what we've just seen. Because there is no prescription of content we can't say that schools ought to be teaching x or they should be teaching y. but what we can do is ask why they are teaching what they are teaching. Because CfE positions teachers as curriculum makers we would hope and expect that they can give very good explanations for why certain topics are included and other topics aren't included.

When we ask schools then why did you teach this period or why did you choose to teach these things these are the kinds of answers that we get. In a lot of cases schools are then giving what is called consumer preference. And you can see Lauren there in the top row. She says 'well if they're choosing in January you want to make sure that these sexier topics, if you like, are in there because you want them to pick history'. So Lauren is saying we choose topics that we know will interest kids in S1 and S2 so that they take it in the senior phase. another reason that schools give very frequently is a lot of it comes down to what resources do we have because we can't afford to just go with "oh we're going to change three entire units" because that would cost money. So what Elizabeth in school 11 is saying here is the curriculum decisions are not made for any reason beyond what can we afford to do, what resources we have. And then the third reason that we can see here is by Jenny. and Jenny says 'this is the really bad thing, I think with teaching at the moment: we're probably thinking ahead to what they're going to need if they sit history as an exam... which you maybe shouldn't be doing in the first and second year'.

So what you can see from these three reasons, which were the overwhelming and majority of reasons the teachers gave it for their curriculum preferences, is what is happening in curriculum decisions in the BGE are not being driven by what is best for children to know what do children need to know. It's being driven by how we get them to take it in the senior phase. How do we prepare them better for the senior phase or something as simple as what's easiest. And this is obviously not the way the Curriculum for Excellence imagined curriculum making would happen.

Now for the record I'm not having to go at teachers here. And I am not criticising teachers for the decisions that they make or the reasons that they give for the decisions they make. Because the reasons they give are perfectly sensible. If you know that you are going to be judged by SQA in a high accountability system it makes some kind of rational sense to think about that in S1 and S2. If you know that your job security relies on students taking the subject in senior phase it makes sense to try to persuade them to take the subject in S1 and S2 and give the consumer, if you like, what they want. And it makes sense if there's not enough money to teach those topics that you do have enough money about. So I am not having a go at teachers. The curriculum decisions that are being made are entirely rational. They might be rational but they're not healthy. They're not the idea that was imagined when Curriculum for Excellence gave school teachers more control over the curriculum. So hopefully you understand that this is not about me criticizing teachers or denigrating teachers but it's important to ask whether this matters. Whether it matters that what children are learning and whether they're missing out on anything important. and one way that we can do this is by doing much larger surveys of what schools teach and so recently I completed the historical association survey which looked at Scotland and England and what is being taught in the two nations

And there are massive differences between what is happening in Scotland and what is happening in England. So in Scotland, just 63 of Scottish schools responded that they teach at least one lesson about the slave trade in the BGE. So that's less than two-thirds of children learn about the slave trade in S1 and S2. Remember, only some of them will go on to study it higher up the school. Less than half of Scottish schools taught at least one lesson about a non-European society. So in S1 and S2 less than half of schools are learning about countries and their pasts outside Europe. Just 36 percent of Scottish schools taught at least one lesson about the British Empire in the BGE. So in S1 and S2 only around the third of children are learning about the British Empire.

The same is true of migration to Britain and just 17 of Scottish high schools teach at least one lesson about the black British experience. What is perhaps more relevant is this idea of teachers as curriculum makers. So Curriculum for Excellence positions teachers as curriculum makers and, quite rightly in my view, it says that teachers are best placed to select the knowledge and select the pedagogies that work for their children in their care in their local context. They know their students best and so they are best placed to select knowledge. I completely agree with that they are best placed to select knowledge, but is this happening? Are they doing it? And the evidence suggests, well, maybe not.

So this graph here compares the English data with the Scottish data and it asked: have you recently changed your history curriculum to make it more inclusive or diverse? 45 of English teachers said they had made considerable changes just six percent of Scottish teachers had said the same. Just four percent of English teachers said they had made no changes recently and that was over 30 in Scotland. So we've got this paradox here that Scottish teachers are entrusted and empowered to make their curriculum and to make a curriculum that works for the children in their care to select the most important relevant knowledge for their children and it seems like the evidence is that this is not happening as frequently or for the right reasons as we might like.

The next question, of course, is whether this matters. You know the whole point of curricula like Curriculum for Excellence is that the government is explicitly not telling schools what knowledge is important. It is allowing schools to make that decision with their children in their particular contexts. Now that is a principle that I wholeheartedly agree with, however, it is a slippery slope from that argument to saying that it doesn't matter what we teach and we can teach anything and all knowledge is as good as all other knowledge. And what we have to remember is that the BGE is very short: around 50 percent of children discontinue their study of history at the end of S2. I mean, we can say the same - the similar statistics - about other subjects between the BGE and the uptake in the senior phase. So the BGE is hugely important. That is the time when we are speaking to everyone. We are speaking to every citizen of Scotland and what we're seeing is that, in many cases, children are seeing a very arbitrary and narrow curriculum. So they have two years of History in S1 and S2 and they're doing perhaps the Scottish Wars of Independence and they're doing World War One.

And what we're also seeing is that the reasons for selecting those topics are about the senior phase. So we hear schools saying well we have to pick topics that will get them to take it in the senior phase or we have to develop skills that they will use in the senior phase. So what we've lost is a sense that the BGE has a meaning and a value and a purpose in and of itself.

And this is really problematic because we need to have a debate about those two years of the BGE that we've got in high school. And we need to think about what knowledge can we honestly say that children need to have before they leave school. Okay, remembering that half of children aren't going to take it any further after S2. And, I think, when we start to have that debate we start to ask questions like: 'can a child understand the world we live in

without understanding colonization and imperialism?'; 'can they understand the current patterns of global inequality without understanding where they come from?'; 'can they understand why so much of the world speaks English and French and Spanish without understanding that period?'. If we don't do this work around teaching the Transatlantic slave trade, around teaching and colonization and imperialism, about teaching migration to the British Isles. If we don't explicitly step in to teach children about diversity, who is going to do that? And we know who's going to do that; extremist websites are going to do that. If we don't step up and say that we have an obligation to teach children and the meaningful and justifiable evidence-based knowledge about the world. If we abdicate that responsibility then children will find substitutes for that elsewhere and we can guarantee that those substitutes will not be evidence-based and they will not be just disoriented and they will be narrow and they will be extremist. And so we've got an obligation here to children as citizens.

And finally, we can ask the question: 'are we teaching good history if we aren't teaching representative history?' That's obviously more of a history specific question.

And I feel the need to say this again - I'm not having a go at teachers here. I do have massive concerns about the way that knowledge is thought about and talked about in Scottish education but this is not me having a go at teachers. As I've said teachers are acting in perfectly rational ways. If they feel that they are judged by SQA examination results, by insight data, by positive destinations, by standardised assessments in the primary school, they will prioritize those things they will do what they need to do to maximize performance in those accountability measures. And that's perfectly rational. And so this is not about me saying the teachers aren't doing their jobs properly or they need to do something differently. It's about me saying that there needs to be a system level change that starts to value knowledge and starts to talk about knowledge as an ethical responsibility. So this is not about me having a pop of teachers.

So to finish, I just want to say a little bit about the importance of taking knowledge seriously. And these are questions that - obviously these are going to be more familiar questions I think to teachers in further education and secondary education and upper primary - but these are questions that we regularly hear from children: 'why would anyone need to know this?'; 'What's the point of this?'; 'Why do we have to learn this?'; 'When will I ever need to know this in real life?' and when children say this we've got to ask whether we're really listening to what's being said.

So often when a pupil says 'what's the point of this?' what the teacher hears is that the child is trying to be wilfully disruptive. And sometimes the teacher can take a defensive response to this, can discipline the student or just allow the student to disengage. More often when a pupil says 'what's the point of this?' what the teacher hears is 'I am bored' or 'you're boring'. And what we see then is a reactive response from schools. They try and make the lessons more fun, they try to make the lessons more engaging. In other words they make a pedagogical response to what the child is saying. If the child is bored the child needs more entertaining. But crucially, the child has not said 'I am bored', crucially what the child has actually said is 'what's the point of this?' And what if when a child says 'what's the point of this?' we actually hear 'what is the point of this?' What if we take those words at face value? What if we say that the child is genuinely asking us 'why do I need to know this?'; 'When am I going to use this in real life?'; 'what is the point of this?' What if what we do is we think about lesson planning and school level planning and curriculum planning from the point of view of purpose rather than from the point of view of pedagogy?

I think part of the problem that we're seeing is that we've got what I would consider an outdated educational contract with our children and in effect what we say is if you agree to listen to your teacher I will do a good job, you will get good grades. If you get good grades you'll get a good job and a good job will mean a comfortable life. And that is the message that we are communicating to students: that this is a deal. Do as you expected and it will pay off in the future. But I wonder whether children are hearing this in quite the same way as they heard this 30 or 40 years ago. Children might not actually say these things or explicitly think these things but children might well be asking themselves how common good jobs are now, you know, in a context where we see a rise in casual employment and zero hour contracts and wages falling for pretty much everybody, they're entitled to be a little bit cynical about this contract that you will get a good job. Similarly they're entitled to be cynical about the idea of whether there's enough opportunities to go around. That are fewer proportionally high-skilled jobs than ever there were. Can the planet sustain endlessly rising living in standards? Is school knowledge still relevant? They are thinking these questions and they are asking us these questions when they say what's the point of this why would anybody need to know this and we can't answer those questions unless we actually hear them for the questions they are: 'tell me why this is important'; 'tell me why this is purposeful'. Because we have to remember the context within which we're working. In the context within which our children will be growing up. I'm not in the habit of necessarily quoting the OECD favourably, but the OECD here are asking us about the role of knowledge that children will need to thrive and shape their world in in the future. And it's not about if you get enough good credentials you'll be all right. And I'm a bit worried that the idea has taken root that in order to understand these complex problems that we see in 2022 we need some kind of new schooling we need a focus on generic 21st century transferable skills. And I would say that we need to not lose sight of the value of knowing things and of the importance of knowing things and our ethical responsibility as teachers to help children to know things. and these ideas taken from social realism and you can see here a quote by Michael Young at the bottom and the "powerful knowledge" is powerful because it provides the best understanding of the natural and social worlds that we have and helps us to go beyond our individual experiences'.

Children need knowledge, need to know what we know in order to be able to make sense of the world in which they live. They can't navigate an extraordinarily complex world simply with 21st century skills. and to expand on this idea a little bit and I think we have fallen into the trap of thinking that because knowledge has traditionally been used to reinforce unfairness and to reinforce inequality that knowledge in itself is regressive or reactionary or elitist. And this is the traditional view of the way we talk about knowledge. And that if that you're that if we get children to learn the same knowledge as the powerful and we get children to learn to think in the ways of the powerful think, then they'll get into universities, they'll get influential jobs, they'll get jobs in the law or the media or government and that will improve their lot. This is that old-fashioned educational contract that I talked about at the start. And if we think about knowledge only like this, then knowledge is regressive and conservative and elitist. Because it becomes about children learning knowledge in order to fit in. learning the same things as existing elites in order for them to allow to, in order for them to join the elites. Okay. The psychology of if you can't beat them join them. And so I would rightly be critical of any idea which talks about knowledge in these terms. Because these terms do frame knowledge as conservative, elitist and reactionary. What I talk about instead is a form of social realism that takes knowledge seriously. That children do need to know things about the world. And they do need to know how to do things: how to do things in science or how to do things in art or how to do things in home economics or mathematics. They need to know how to do these things. But they also need to work on connecting these things to their everyday knowledge and experience.

But what we can't have is an education system which excludes the top left of that triad. We can't just have an education system that focuses on everyday knowledge and experience and skills. We need to take knowledge seriously. Because it's only when we take knowledge seriously that we can get to what we actually want. And this is where the ethics come into it. It's only when we take knowledge seriously that we can get social change. This is not about teaching children knowledge so that a few of them can go to the best universities and they can in some sense escape their destiny or escape their social class. It is about changing these things about the ethics of building a fairer society and we have to accept that knowledge has a role within that.

And this is summarized really well by my esteemed co-presenter Gert Biesta when he says this: 'This means foregrounding the question of how different areas of knowledge can provide opportunities for the ways in which unique individuals can come into the world. This does not imply a merely instrumental engagement with curricular knowledge but rather a means to take the content of education very seriously. It is, after all. Only when such content is taken seriously that it provides something to engage with something to take a stand towards and thus provides a possible entry into the world.' so it's this idea of taking knowledge seriously that I think is an ethical obligation on the part of all tutors. And it's something that all teachers should be doing.

So the last section of the presentation is just about the ethics of taking knowledge seriously because this is, after all, about the teachers standards and I want an ethical commitment to knowledge to be part of the teacher's standard.

So just by way of a recap what am I saying here and I'm saying that knowing things in itself is not elitist. And expecting children to know things is not in itself elitist. But at the same time not all elite knowledge is powerful. Okay the opposite might well be true. But really powerful knowledge about liberation, about injustice, and these kinds of ideas might actively have been suppressed by elites. But just because some elite knowledge is problematic that does not follow that all elite knowledge is therefore oppressive. We can't reverse that syllogism. So knowledge can alienate and isolate children but it can also empower children if we select this knowledge well. Knowledge can be negotiated with students. Children are funds of knowledge your community that you work in is a place that you can meaningfully learn from, and that's hugely important, that the ethics of knowledge involve being open to learning from your children, from your students.

And the last thing to say is that knowledge is not inert. This idea that that we can safely get rid of knowledge because it can always be googled isn't true. Facts may be unchanging but knowledge is constantly changing. Which facts we emphasize, which facts are superseded by new facts, which stories we tell because stories are more than just bundles of facts these things are all hugely important.

And these are brought together in a three elements way of thinking by I'Anson and Jasper. These say that thinking about teaching involves these three important elements. A critical element, which means a willingness to question our point of view as well as others that reflexivity is important. An ethical element which says what are our responsibilities and obligations to ourselves, our students and the world. And an experimental element which means that we've got to try and translate ideas into practice and we might not always get this right but we've got to experiment in an ethical way. And if you're interested there's lots of

work around how this kind of curriculum design which includes knowledge can be operationalized in the curriculum.

So Elizabeth Rata has come up with this idea of curriculum design coherence. And it's not something I buy into entirely but you can see here that what Rata and colleagues are talking about is having a concept that is centred and then breaking down these concepts into sub-concepts and inferential concepts and then making the curriculum about children developing familiarity and facility with these concepts.

As with all of these provocations I probably left more questions than answers. My basic point is that the question of what knowledge should be in the curriculum is an ethical question. My basic point is that at present teachers are enabled to select content within the curriculum, particularly in primary and BGE, but they are not capitalizing on this opportunity that they have. And the teachers an important dimension of teaching has to be to consider the ethical implications of knowledge. To understand that knowledge has power and we have duties towards society, towards knowledge and towards our children to share that. And to think carefully about what knowledge might be needed. and I'm going to leave you with an extract from Sebastian Faulk's book *Birdsong* and I'm not going to take credit for plucking this example out because the example is one that I've taken from a paper by Peter Hillis and but I think is a really poignant place to finish.

Looking at the pillars covered on all sides by the names carved on them, she asked a man sweeping the space beneath the arch: 'Who are there, these...?' She gestured with her hand.

'These?' The man with the brush sounded surprised. 'The lost.'

'Men who died in this battle?'

'No. The lost, the ones they did not find. The others are in the cemeteries.'

'These are just the... unfound?' She looked at the vault above her head and then around in panic at the endless writing, as though the surface of the sky had been papered in footnotes.

When she could speak again, she said. 'From the whole war?'

The man shook his head

'Just these fields.' He gestured with his arm.

Elizabeth went and sat on the steps on the other side of the monument.

Beneath her was a formal garden with some rows of white headstones, each with a tended plant or flower at its base, each cleaned and beautiful in the weak winter sunlight.

'Nobody told me.' She ran her fingers with their red-painted nails back through her thick dark hair. 'My God, nobody told me.'

And this I think really summarises everything that I've been trying to say about the ethics of knowledge. How do we save our students from a 'no one told me' moment? How do we think carefully and seriously about knowledge so that we understand that we have this ethical obligation as educators to our children, to society and to knowledge? So that's the end of my provocation. Thanks very much for listening. You can see my contact details are there at the bottom of this slide if anybody wants to get in touch and again there is a reference list if anybody wants to follow up on any of the things that I've spoken about today.