

IDENTITY IN THE CURRICULUM CYMREIG

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Here, Richard describes strategies that his school employs to support pupils in exploring and developing their Welsh identity.

Just what is identity? What does it mean to us individually, and what does it mean in the context of the National Curriculum for Wales, both in practise and within the classroom? I have explored, through discussions with colleagues and pupils, how and why we should develop a sense of positive identity in our pupils.

Identity is difficult to define. *The Oxford Dictionary* notes that 'identity' is 'the fact of being who or what a person or thing is'. This definition could mean

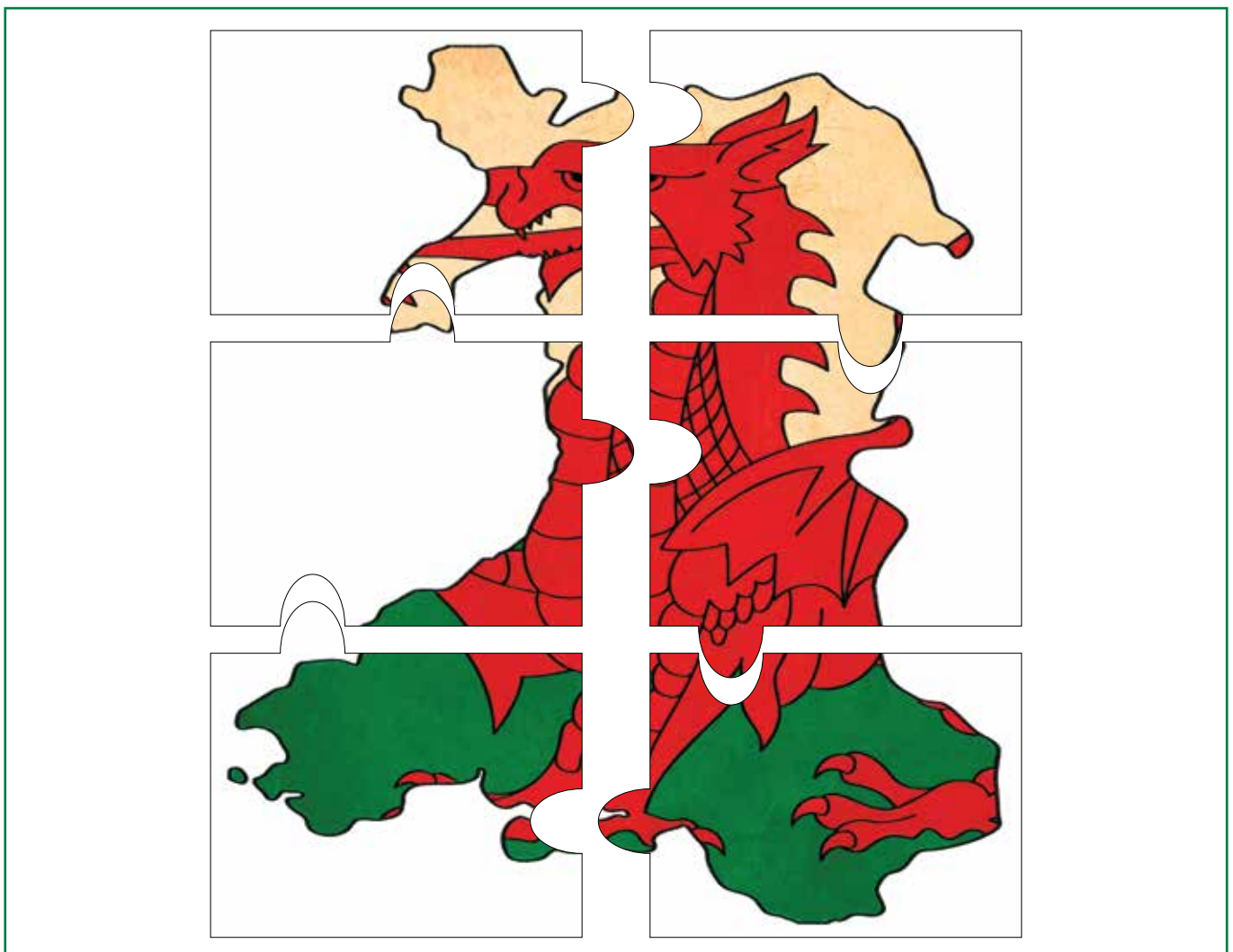
entirely different things to everyone who reads it. Upon asking my class what they thought identity was, I received a huge variety of answers, including 'What you look like', 'Where you were born' and 'What your beliefs are'. With deeper questioning, many of my pupils described their own identity as their full names, some added their dates of birth, and others gave responses such as 'Being Welsh', 'Being from Britain' and 'Speaking Welsh'.

I wanted to determine what the pupils believed their 'class identity' was. Following a discussion we agreed that our class identity was 'a happy, friendly group of people who all try their best'. Next, I asked the pupils whether they thought you could have both an individual and class identity. They concluded that you could, and that

you could go further, and have a sports team identity, a drama or theatre group identity, and so on.

Once we had established what identity means to pupils, how they would describe their own, and that they could have more than one identity, we explored whether identity changes over time: as people grow older, or as they move to different parts of the country or the world.

In order to understand collective identity in more detail and how it is interwoven into the Welsh education system, we must go deeper than just the terminology. We must look at the values that people share, what people deem as important to themselves (their heritage, their community) and which common characteristics they share to reach that common 'image', or collective identity.



Bringing the pieces of the jigsaw together: The Curriculum Cymreig aims to ensure that the Welsh aspect of heritage and culture is studied, celebrated and learnt about in schools wherever possible. Image © SmileStudio/Shutterstock.

It can be difficult to define identity when looking at it within the context of the National Curriculum for Wales. The questions 'Who are we as a nation?' and 'What makes us Welsh?' could be used to help agree on a definition, yet there are so many different answers. This is the challenge for teachers, to foster in pupils a positive, individual sense of identity and a collective 'Welsh' sense of identity. The Open University notes that identity is more than answering 'Who am I?'; that sharing an identity requires 'active management' on the behalf of the facilitator (Open University, 2015). In our school the Curriculum Cymreig (ACCAC, 2003) supports the facilitation of a common identity and culture.

The driver behind Curriculum Cymreig was to ensure that the Welsh aspect of heritage and culture was studied, celebrated and learnt about in schools wherever possible through the National Curriculum subjects, but also in extra-curricular work. The document states that: 'A Curriculum Cymreig helps pupils to understand and celebrate the distinctive quality of living and learning in Wales in the twenty-first century, to identify their own sense of Welshness and to feel a heightened sense of belonging to their local community and country' (ACCAC, 2003).

Moving back to my earlier point about individual and collective identity, the Curriculum Cymreig aims allow us all to have our own, individual, ideas and thoughts around identity, but also to share a common set of beliefs and values. To my mind, the Curriculum Cymreig should be seen as an umbrella, spanning as it does all National Curriculum areas in order to ensure that our pupils leave school knowing and celebrating their Welsh heritage.

Within the context of geography, Simon Catling describes 'how we feel about different places' as being of equal importance to knowledge and understanding relating to geographical issues (Catling, 2004). The Curriculum Cymreig aims to foster a positive feeling and attitude towards living in Wales and being Welsh. It complements the teaching of geography and helps to focus on 'aspects of the programmes of study for geography relating to skills and enquiry, and knowledge of the local area and a contrasting locality' (ACCAC, 2003).

In our school, putting the Curriculum Cymreig into practice in terms of the development of subject areas is an easy task. We regularly review planning as a whole-staff, and support each other using our own subject strengths. When deciding upon topics, we consider such aspects as 'Could the pupils study life in Swansea during the Second World War?', 'Could we read *Bullies and Blacklegs* (Wyn Jones

and Jones, 2002) as a Victorian-themed novel in English?' or 'In art, can we study the work of Mary Lloyd Jones (a Welsh landscape artist)?'. Questions and ideas relating our own identity and thoughts on the Curriculum Cymreig relating to our teaching allow us to make simple but highly effective changes to planning. In turn these then help us to realise the aims of the Curriculum Cymreig.

When we consider the wider whole-school ethos and the Curriculum Cymreig, we find the structure and emphasis of the document changes from acting as umbrella across all subject areas to being more like a jigsaw puzzle. Each part of the puzzle has its place and the full puzzle creates a wonderful image of Welsh understanding and pride in heritage celebrated.

Without the whole-school ethos the provision and development of the Curriculum Cymreig would not be as effective and could appear somewhat disjointed. Estyn, the Welsh School Inspectorate, have produced several best-practice case studies showing how different institutions have successfully embedded the Curriculum Cymreig across the life of their school. Our most recent Estyn Inspection in 2013 noted a significant strength of the school was that 'standards of Welsh as a second language are very good [and that] the promotion of the Welsh language, its heritage and culture is a very strong feature of the school' (see Ysgol Esgob Morgan Inspection report in web panel). We have found that by fostering a strong sense of shared Welsh identity and heritage we can help pupils to develop as responsible local, national and global citizens.

The global aspect of citizenship comes into play through the Curriculum Cymreig as the pupils learn to compare and contrast their own identity to those found around the UK and beyond. In this way they develop a mutual respect for other cultures and a deeper tolerance towards exploring the views of others. In line with the aims of the Global Learning Programme (see web panel), pupils develop both their critical thinking skills and a better understanding of interdependence.

To this end, all school-aged pupils in Wales have the opportunity to, and in our school are encouraged to, become members of the Urdd (the largest youth organisation in Europe, which enables pupils to compete in a wide variety of activities and tasks, including cookery, sports, poetry, dance, music and drama – see web panel). Each region in Wales holds an 'Eisteddfod' where pupils compete against each other in the different competitions. The winning pupils then take part in the Urdd National Eisteddfod. Taking part in the Urdd National Eisteddfod provides pupils with the opportunity to make new friends, learn new skills and to

share their culture and heritage with others from across Wales.

As well as organising the National Eisteddfod, the Urdd operates outdoor education camps throughout Wales. Pupils can take part in residential visits to these centres in order to extend their Welsh language skills and learn more about Welsh culture and heritage.

Here, the pieces of the jigsaw come together: the emphasis on Wales and the Welsh culture in teaching and learning, a focus on developing bilingualism across the school, one of fostering a sense of local and global citizenship and a whole school ethos of celebrating Wales and what it means to be Welsh. Individually these pieces of the jigsaw may appear insignificant: talking about identity and developing a sense of a collective identity may all seem very obvious in a school setting. The difference with the Curriculum Cymreig is that we do not just say these things, we mean them; and pupils, staff and school community live them day in and day out. Being Welsh and celebrating our culture and identity in Wales comes from the heart and helps us to add depth, relevance and excitement to school life – both in the classroom, and beyond.

References

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- Open University (2015) *Identity in Question*. Available at: www.open.edu/openlearn/society/politics-policy-people/sociology/identity-question/ (last accessed 05/11/2015).
- Catling, S. (2010) 'Understanding and developing primary geography' in Scoffham, S. (ed) *Primary Geography Handbook*. Sheffield: Geographical Association, pp. 74-91.
- Wyn Jones, B. and Jones, J. (2002) *Bullies and Blacklegs*. Swansea: Gwasg Gwynedd.



WEB RESOURCES

GLP Wales: <https://globaldimension.org.uk/glpwales>
 Mary Lloyd Jones artwork: www.marylloydjones.co.uk/
 The Urdd: www.urdd.cymru/cy/ (Welsh)
www.urdd.cymru/en/ (English)
 Ysgol Esgob Morgan Inspection report: www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection/inspection-report-ysgol-esgob-morgan-2013-english-only

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