The spiral curriculum and the learning journey

To understand how to design and teach a programme for the Certificate, it's important that programme leaders understand one of the essential principles of the qualification - that it's based upon a *spiral of professional learning*[1]. This spiral is another way of understanding the *'learning journey'* that candidates undertake in the Certificate programme.

The concept of the spiral curriculum comes from the work of Jerome Bruner[2], an influential psychologist and curriculum thinker. In the Certificate, the term refers to a curriculum design in which learners revisit ideas and concepts throughout the 120-hour programme, but in increasing complexity or detail. In this process, learners reinforce previous learning and develop confidence to apply it in work-based learning in their own leadership context.

So an *effective programme design* is one that makes the steps or stages in the learning journey, and the links and connections between them, explicit to the learners. A *successful programme* is one that ensures that learners explore the ideas in each stage before building on, modifying or developing them in subsequent stages. It is important to emphasize that the learning journey through the module is based on a continuing exploration through personal research and collaborative learning of concepts and theories of leadership from the literature. The introductions to the learning outcomes for each unit make this clear.

The Certificate (module 1) programme begins with *key concepts and theories of leadership* on the assumption that learners may have limited previous acquaintance with the field of study.

To begin the programme, the scope is deliberately not limited to leadership in education. It's very stimulating for learners to discuss leadership in politics or business, especially at times when these are in the news and open to public debate.

So, at this stage, learners could debate the *purpose and function* of leadership in public life; about 'good' and 'bad' political leadership and the difference between them; about whether public leaders are 'born' or 'made'; about whether leadership is just concerned with achieving particular aims and goals, or also the means by which these are achieved.. This wider-ranging exploration of leadership could include discussion about the qualities of good leaders, and the relationship between leadership qualities, behaviours and skills.

At the same time, learners could also explore the relationships between *leadership and management* in the business world, between leaders and followers, and between leaders and wider society. This is likely to include discussion about how the impact of leadership is judged and the differences between effective, successful and ethical leadership and how these terms apply to the way in which leaders lead.
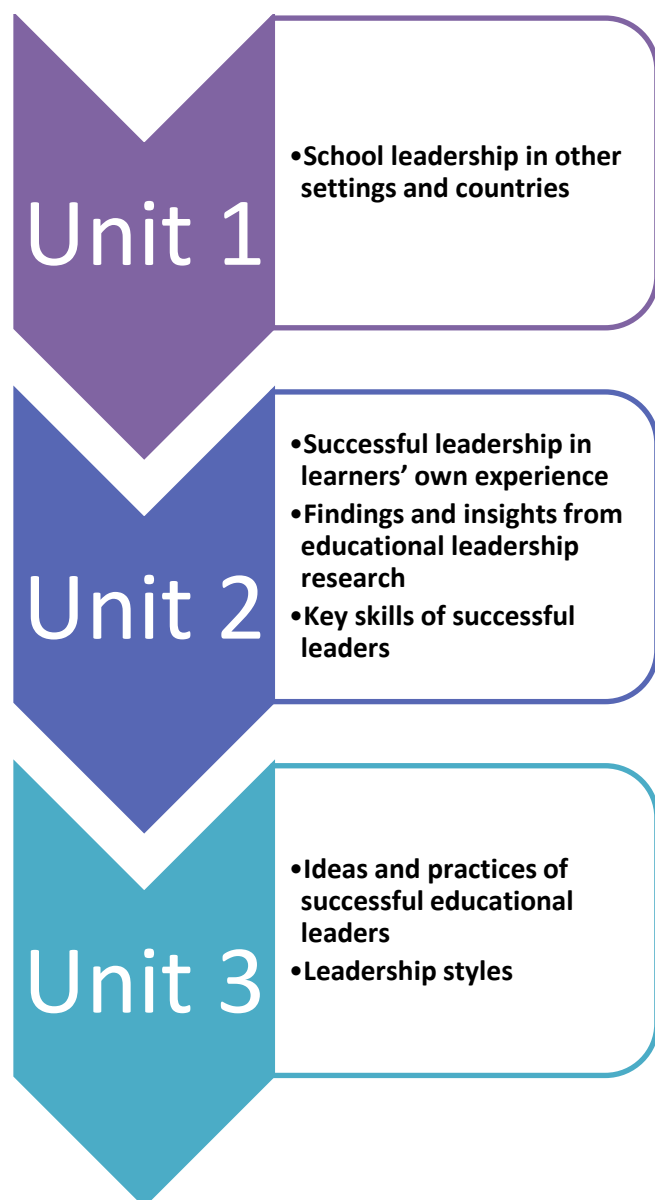
Having this general overview of the concept of leadership, and an initial acquaintance with relevant literature, learners will be well equipped to progress to a consideration of leadership in education. In the process, they may change their view, but should certainly clarify and develop their thinking and understanding, as they focus on the educational context and upon their own leadership role.

---

[1] CICEL syllabus, page 3
[2] Bruner, J. (1960) The Process of Education. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press

Stages in the Module 1 spiral

In general terms, the *spiral of learning* in module 1 develops around these concepts and ideas of leadership, starting with an overview of leadership not limited to the context of education and progressing to more specific concepts:

Unit 1
- School leadership in other settings and countries

Unit 2
- Successful leadership in learners' own experience
- Findings and insights from educational leadership research
- Key skills of successful leaders

Unit 3
- Ideas and practices of successful educational leaders
- Leadership styles

These stages in the spiral can be seen in the relationship between the key questions and learning outcomes for the three units in module 1. This is why it's important to incorporate both in the programme plan and to structure learning around the key questions. Programme plans should include activities that enable learners to explore each of the steps in the learning journey.

The order in which the concepts and ideas occur is intentional and should be followed. For example, the spiral graphic (left) indicates that learners should research **school leadership in other countries** first, after their general introduction to leadership and before considering successful leadership in their own setting. Researching educational leadership in other countries (for example, national case studies from OECD, 2008[3]) gives learners a perspective on their own setting that enables informative comparisons and contrasts to be made.

The relationship between *leadership skills and practices* in the outline is another example of the progression of ideas in the learning spiral. Learners think about key leadership skills in unit 2, before considering the ways in which these skills inform and support their leadership practices in unit 3. The term *'leadership practices'* in this unit refers to both leadership behaviours and plans and strategies for action.

Finally, it is important to note that the reference to leadership styles comes only in unit 3, in the context of leadership practices, plans and strategies. This is the appropriate stage for learners to think about this aspect of leadership theory rather than at the beginning of the module. It's important that learners think about the big issues about the roles and purposes of leadership and the skills and practices of successful leaders before considering leadership styles.

In general, only ideas from *instructional and transformational leadership models* are relevant to the approach to educational leadership taken in the syllabus: module 2 focusses on *leading and improving teaching and learning* (an extension of the concept of instructional leadership); module 3 focusses on *leading change for improvement and developing staff* (developing the concept of transformational leadership).

---

[3] Pont, B., Nusche, D. and Hopkins, D. (eds) (2008) Improving School Leadership, Volume 2: Case Studies on System Leadership; Paris; OECD

The spiral of learning about successful leadership

As well as the spiral of professional learning about leadership, there is a spiral of learning that focusses specifically on the idea of *'successful leadership'* in module 1. It's important for the summative assessment reports that candidates produce for the Certificate that they have a sound understanding of this progression of ideas through the three units.

For unit 1, candidates are required to give an *initial description* of what they think successful leadership looks like in the evidence of learning report. The syllabus makes it clear that this refers specifically to educational leadership and in this description candidates are required to draw on, or refer to, ideas and examples of successful school leadership from other settings, countries and contexts. It's an *initial* description (or *model*) because candidates are expected to develop and refine it during units 1 and 2.

In the evidence of reflection for unit 1, candidates are required to critique this model of successful leadership and reflect on the implications for their own leadership practice. The model should not be description of their own current leadership, but rather an *ideal view drawn from their research*. Candidates are expected to be able to reflect on both the strengths and weaknesses of the model. For example, there may be aspects that the candidate thinks are inappropriate to apply in their own cultural or organisational context.

For unit 2, candidates take these ideas further, using *key findings from the research about successful educational leadership* as the basis for the interview with an experienced leader. The implication in the syllabus is that the interviewee is experienced enough to have a view of successful leadership – but is not necessarily an example of the leadership qualities identified by the candidate in unit 1.

It's important that the evidence of practice shows that the interview has been focused by the candidate's interview questions. The focus is meant to be on *definitions of success* rather than on *the practice of the experienced leader*. Candidates may find that the interview brings out certain cultural views of successful leadership that are in contrast to ideas from the international literature the candidate has researched.

Also in the unit 2 assessment reports, candidates first indicate (or *outline,* in the evidence of learning) and then *analyse* in more detail the skills they need to develop to be successful in their leadership practice. The final part of the evidence of reflection for this unit requires candidates to think about the practicalities of developing these skills, and the time and support required. This is an important requirement. Candidates need to provide a *realistic and reasonably convincing outline*.
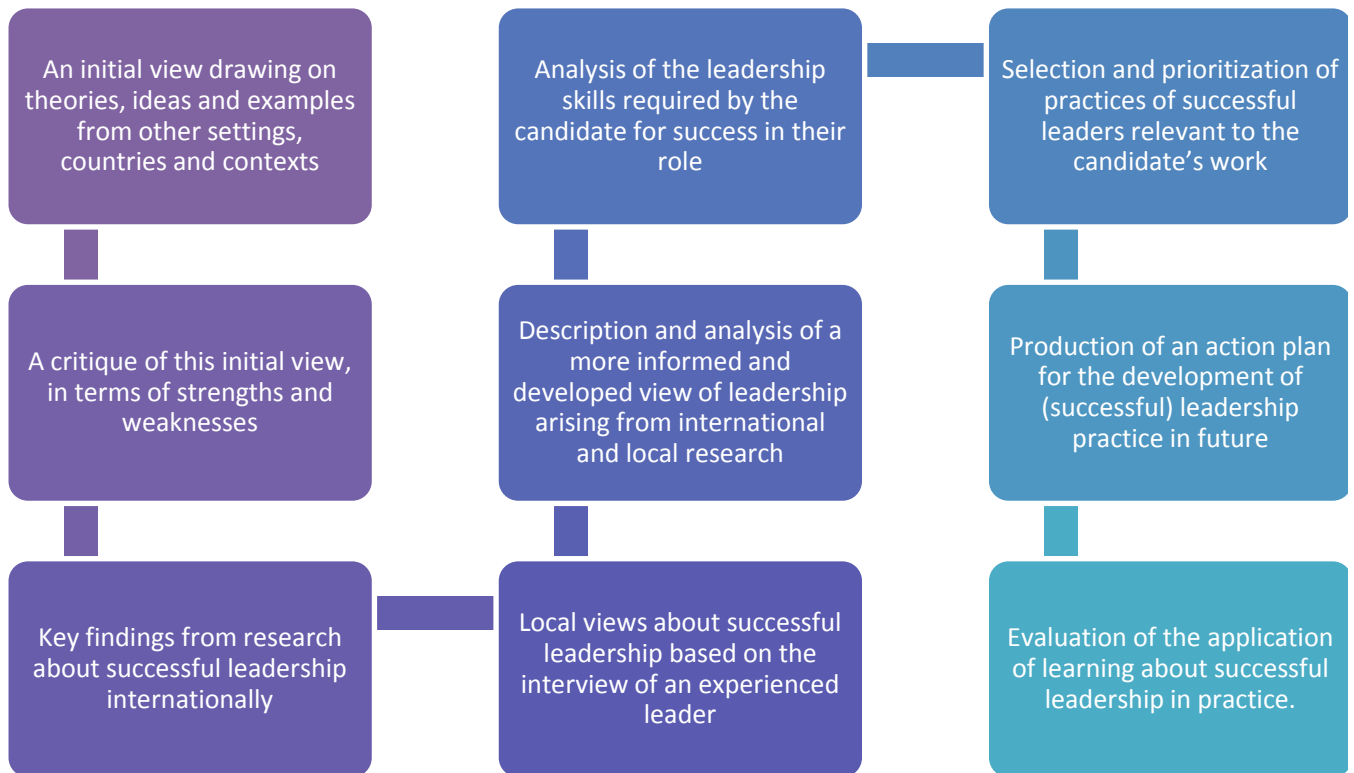
The thinking done by learners about leadership skills in this unit underpins the thinking about leadership practices in unit 3, and learners return to ideas about skills in modules 2 and 3. However, it's not expected that candidates actually **implement the plan**, as they move on to the broader issue of the practices of successful leaders in unit 3.

In this unit, a practice is seen as a pattern of professional action and activity, something that a successful leader does habitually in order to achieve success. This can be as varied as giving effective positive feedback, to developing peer evaluation of classroom practice, to leading a professional development programme for departmental colleagues.

The number of such ideas and practices selected for unit 3 will depend on their complexity or difficulty – *the more complex, the practice the fewer that should be selected*. Once again, it should be emphasized that the syllabus does not expect candidates to have acted upon this programme of ideas and practices during this unit. It is a modelling exercise shaped by professional feedback which results in an action plan for the further development of the learner as a successful leader. However, the unit 3 evidence of reflection makes it clear that candidates *are* expected to have developed their practice as a result of their learning for the Certificate.

Stages of the spiral of learning about educational leadership in the Cambridge International Certificate programmes

So, to sum up, the spiral of learning about successful educational leadership in the Certificate programme should include these stages:

An initial view drawing on theories, ideas and examples from other settings, countries and contexts	Analysis of the leadership skills required by the candidate for success in their role	Selection and prioritization of practices of successful leaders relevant to the candidate's work
A critique of this initial view, in terms of strengths and weaknesses	Description and analysis of a more informed and developed view of leadership arising from international and local research	Production of an action plan for the development of (successful) leadership practice in future
Key findings from research about successful leadership internationally	Local views about successful leadership based on the interview of an experienced leader	Evaluation of the application of learning about successful leadership in practice.

An understanding of the spiral design of the syllabus will support good programme planning and delivery as well as successful completion of the summative assessment for the Certificate in Educational Leadership