The Turbulent Times of Creativity in the National Curriculum

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ABSTRACT This article traces the demise of creativity in the national curriculum in England and Wales. It is argued that the creative dimension in the national curriculum has been purged by various government directives since the Ruskin speech in 1976, all aiming to introduce provisions of standardisation, centralisation, and vocationalisation of education. The plethora of centralised testing regimes and quality assurance measures has not only damaged the esteem of teachers and pupils, but has also turned education into a game where teachers teach the art of passing exams, and pupils realise the academic dangers of non-conformity. In the second section of this article it is suggested that despite New Labour's infatuation with measurable standards, it seems the assault on creative subjects is being reversed somewhat, and various efforts have been introduced to bolt creativity onto the national curriculum with the aim of re-energising teachers' and pupils' creative spirits. The article finishes by offering further avenues of thought and concludes by suggesting that a truly inspiring, satisfying and rewarding curriculum can only result from moving from a business-education-orientated education system to a child-centred learning experience.

> Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them … Stick to the Facts, sir! (Thomas Gradgrind, in Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, 1854)

The situation 151 years on:

> I don't think we're an education service that invites innovation or risk-taking in the way that we need to do. It's too public if you fail, the cost of failure is too great. (Estelle Morris [former Education Secretary], 2002)

Introduction

This article critiques the status of creativity in the national curriculum in England and Wales. This objective is met by exploring the recent history of creativity in the education system and the current situation, and by analysing debate revolving around the future of creativity in education.

In the first of two sections, the idea that creativity in the education system has gradually been subordinated is explored. Discussion is drawn from a sociological, historical and political perspective, examining various legislative interventions and considering their effects on creativity in education. This section observes how the school curriculum has gradually become conformist and constrictive, the upshot of which has been the devaluation of creativity in the national curriculum. Among others, Davis (2000) has suggested that the discourse of standardisation and centralisation of the educational framework has diminished the autonomy of teachers, restricted teaching strategies and purged creative thinking in the classroom. This section looks at how a

centralised and standardised curriculum with the primary concern of measuring *standards* affects teachers and learners.

In section two, discussion focuses on the contemporary developments regarding creativity in education. Recent government directives suggest that the government has reconsidered the decline of creative principles in education, and taken measures to reinstate a creative dimension in the curriculum. Attention is drawn to current discourse in academic texts that advocate the benefits of a creative education. The article then concludes with a summary of the key points offering further avenues of research.

At the outset it is necessary to define the vexed terms *creativity* and *education*. Creativity has historically been a multifaceted term, having various definitions in different disciplines. To exemplify this, it is possible to locate creativity in the paradigm of business and commerce, where its definition lies within the remits of entrepreneurship and enterprise (Tooley, 1996); alternatively, in sociology creativity is a measure of innovation (Craft, 2001). For present purposes, creativity is referred to in its generic sense, encompassing every kind of creativity.

In the context of this article, the term *education* refers to the national curriculum in England and Wales. It seems this is a manageable scope, and to include further education, higher education, private schools, independent schools and other levels of education would encapsulate a range that would be insurmountable in the space allocated here.

1. The Subordination of Creativity in the Education System

The devaluation of creative subjects in the education system can be traced back to the 1920s, a time when 'a common criticism of the school [system] ... [was] that they no longer attend[ed] to the three Rs ... but fritter[ed] their time away with all sorts of fancy subjects' (Thomson, 1929, p. 40). Much transpired in education up to the 1976 Ruskin speech by Prime Minister James Callaghan, but it is from this epochal point that this article will begin the potted history of creativity in education.

Callaghan's speech announced a vocationalisation of the school curriculum, a resolution to remedy the increasingly unskilled workforce (Simon, 1991). This objective was achieved by gearing the school curriculum towards the purposes of industry, which effectively started the discourse of vocational education and marked the beginning of the subordination of creativity in the school syllabus (Green, 2003).

The Ruskin speech significantly changed the nature of education. The child-centred approach to education advocated by progressive educationalists such as John Dewey, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Plato [1] had been replaced by a more structured curriculum emphasising the core skills of literacy and numeracy. In effect, this was the beginning of a new centralised education system driven by economics; this is mirrored by New Labour's education system today.

The introduction of a tighter educational framework by the Ruskin speech had established a pretext for a national curriculum. In 1988 the Education Reform Act (ERA) implemented a highly centralised and standardised educational framework. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's reforms had an enormously significant impact on the nature of education, and the content of the school syllabus in particular. The national curriculum installed a rigid and prescriptive educational framework, consequently squeezing the principles of creativity and autonomy out of teaching and learning (Jones, 2001). This manoeuvre to centralise the education system had profound implications for creativity and pedagogy. These are discussed later in this article.

The vocational discourse in higher education, prompted by the Ruskin speech, is now arguably stronger than ever before (albeit driven by the economy rather than the student) with the introduction of work-based enrichment courses and foundation degrees. However, practice-based activities in compulsory education are minimal and restricted to only a few subjects, with pedagogy returning to an era of teaching by rote and passive learning instead of learning by interaction or risk-taking (Layton, 2002). This damaging lack of emancipation in the educational framework is criticised by Kimbell et al, who state that 'the centralizing influence of a National Curriculum runs the risk of placing a dead weight on innovation – discouraging imaginative teachers and schools from developing their curricula' (Kimbell et al, 1996, p. 99).

Research conducted by Davis (2000) found that the provision of standardisation and rigid control of the curriculum was having an adverse effect on pupils' creativity in schools. This research exposed the climate of high anxiety among pupils, who were aware that the measurement of their success depended on reaching the prescribed standards of the national curriculum. This meant that pupils were reluctant to indulge in creativity, and preferred to comply with the expectations specified by the framework. The Davis (2000) study discovered that the inflexible and highly structured teaching methods advocated by the standardised curriculum had not only affected students, but teachers also felt less autonomous and their role as *teacher* had been devalued to the role of *facilitator* of the national curriculum. The ramifications of this were that a liberal, progressive child-centred approach to learning could not be adopted, and tailoring teaching strategies to maximise learning was restricted because of pressures from the quality inspectorates. The study found that the requirement to reach national targets and maintain reputations in league tables meant that teaching methods lacked flair and reflexivity, because teachers wanted to stay within the box, and keep the pupils there too.

The Davis (2000) study is an exemplar of the problems that lace a curriculum which is inflexible and prescriptive, infatuated with the desire to measure success through assessment. Ryan echoes these sentiments: 'the constant assessment of pupils and teachers stifles any enjoyment of what are the glorious jewels of human achievement. We should marvel at how stuff works without worrying about SATs, or the Quality Assurance Agency' (Ryan, 2000, p. 30).

Performance indicators and standards inspectorates culminate in teachers avoiding risks (Campbell, 1998). Teachers are positioned in a catch-22 situation where they are inclined to conform to the curriculum specification rather than indulge in vibrant and energised pedagogy driven by ingenuity. Teachers do not encourage Independent thinking and elaborate innovations because the curriculum and standards criteria do not recognise unorthodox creative expressionism (Davis, 2000). Although a pupil in a design and technology class may have produced a unique and innovative piece of work, unless it fits the assessment criteria defined by the state through the learning outcomes, the work is rendered invalid and is not valued by the exclusive system.[2]

The dogmatic insistence by the system on pupils conforming to what is categorised as *acceptable* work according to standards criteria essentially means that pupils are not valued as individuals, rather they are obligated to follow the status quo and play the assessment game. This burdens teachers, who are reluctant to encourage maverick creativity because this kind of expressionism is, in effect, valueless to a system that is based on lifeless standardisation. Pupils who *fail* according to the system's definition also affect teachers who, like students, are under enormous pressures to *perform* to benchmarks at every stage of development. Appealing to a sense of wonder and risk-taking for teachers *and* pupils are forbidden fruits.

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, 2000) provides a 'framework of accountability' for teachers (Clarke, 2002, p. 7). However, this framework is problematic, and its foundations are rooted in the centralisation of the education system. The rhetorical question is this: how can teachers be accountable if they are not responsible? As discussed earlier, the role of the teacher has become less responsible as teachers have less authority because of the tight framework. Despite this, teachers are increasingly expected to be more accountable, even though they are less autonomous than before the centralising interventions. This dichotomy has frustrated teachers and made them disgruntled, as exemplified by the Davis (2000) study cited earlier. But still the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills Charles Clarke remained defiant, stating that 'Ofsted ... has to help teachers become still *more* valued as professionals' (Clarke, 2002, p. 4).

The system in its current form casts a shadow over the professional status of teachers. A teacher's discretion should play a critical role in assessment (Kimbell, 1996), but the lack of autonomy, or rather the lack of trust in teachers, divorces the informed professional judgement of teachers from assessment. The centralised system of assessment is almost patronising to teachers in that the criteria for assessment rest solely on stringent guidelines which teachers simply have to follow. The professional judgement and experience of teaching a particular child is not valued by the system in place, in which the government prefers teachers to tick boxes. Kimbell succinctly summarises this point: 'You cannot know "quality" by reading about it. A standard is what emerges when a teacher adopts a criterion of assessment and interprets it in relation to the work that s/he is engaged in with students' (Kimbell, 1996, p. 16).

It is possible to turn to the age-old debate pertaining to the objective of education: is it to maximise standards by teaching for assessment? Or is the aim of education to provide a holistic, inspiring and stimulating educational experience, enriching the individual and fulfilling his or her potential (Kimbell & Perry, 2001)? The answer to these questions is the defining value of the nature of education, and one that bears a significant weight on the debate about assessment in education.

It is clear that the current assessment framework regards the *process* of learning as less valuable than the *outcome* of pupils' work. The Ofsted rationale statement reads: 'inspection should be focussed on outcomes, less on process' (Clarke, 2002, p. 4). This form of assessment is highly problematic and disregards the learning curve that is involved with the journey to an outcome. Also, the outcome is often made more complex by the vexed learning process, therefore understanding the outcome requires procedural knowledge and experience informed by a rapport established with the individual person and the creative learning journey.

During the developmental process phase of learning, the pupil goes through multiple aspects of problem solving, creative intervention, critical thinking, evaluating, innovating, manipulating and refining ideas, all of which display levels of achievement. To disregard this phase of experimentation to concentrate exclusively upon the outcome seems to be counterproductive, because the journey to the outcome is a learning phase in itself and sometimes more indicative of achievement than the outcome. However, this is not acknowledged by an outcome-led system.

To exacerbate the problem of an overly prescribed curriculum, mired down by standards, centralisation and standardisation, the Third Way political approach adopted by New Labour has introduced a problem of direction for education. Although the Third Way promotes progressive education and innovation, albeit for the purpose of business (Giddens, 2000), its ultimate objective is to utilise education to support a sustainable knowledge economy (Hill, 1999). This shift in ideology has had profound effects on creativity in the education system. The Third Way has a distinct business orientation, and it aspires to a specialist workforce, highly trained to maximise economic return, thus further vocationalising the curriculum (Mulderrig, 2003). Mulderrig comments that '[because of] tighter controls over teaching (or delivery) practices, and a more outcome-orientated curriculum, the functional role of education has penetrated the content and the form of schooling' (Mulderrig, 2003, p. 12).

The Third Way has not only affected the nature of education. Mulderrig notes that the 'intensified codification and regulation of teachers' working practices, alongside an increased emphasis on standards, targets quality and delivery' (2003, p. 12) has standardised and centralised the curriculum more than ever before. Thus, the space in the curriculum for creative expressionism is constrained further, because teachers and pupils prefer to 'play it safe rather than take creative risks' (Kimbell, 2000, p. 209).

The economic global agenda of the Third Way is linked to the 'businessification' of education (Hill, 2002). In the epistemology of New Labour, performance is measured by standards, which in turn are determined by industry's needs. The criterion of 'performativity' demands curricular upheaval, increased vocationalisation and specialisation to meet the needs of industry for particular kinds of knowledge (Boxley, 2003, p. 2). This creates problems for creativity in the educational system, because education and schooling are becoming a process of cultivation for the benefit of industry. Thus, the Third Way's striving for economic maximisation means that the intrinsic value of education is loosing its significance in the wake of commodifying labour power through education (Hill, 1999).

Pupils' freedom to innovate and develop through creative expression and eccentricity is stifled in the political ideology of the Third Way. The 'hierarchy of need' (Maslow, 1954, p. 56) in a knowledge-based economy demands creativity to undertake a business definition, whereby it implies entrepreneurship and enterprise in search of economic benefit (Tooley, 1996) rather than the emancipation and development of pupils' personhood. Inadvertently, the 'task-related knowledge' (Kimbell & Perry, 2001) approach employed in education is in danger of being a destructive, rather than constructive, process by creating a nation of human robots unable to think beyond the scope of their job. The objective of education should be to free the pupil's mind to conceive creatively as many ideas as possible, which in turn opens up more opportunities. Limiting these opportunities via restricting pupils' educational experience (like the Third Way approach does) is undermining cognitive emancipation and empowerment by limiting horizons. The

foundations of this argument can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle, who '[b]oth agree that the training of character must come first and that it must have in view the practical requirements of the community ... They are both equally clear that the highest function of education goes beyond the practical life ... [education's] aim ... is to make us "spectators of reality"' (Burnet, 1967, p. 136).

Setting an agenda for the pupil's life is restricting his/her epistemological outlook, which is essentially limiting the pupil's life choices, stifling liberty and entertaining the idea of social injustice. This is a very simple application of this modernistic theory, and there may be an element of overstatement here, but there is clearly room for the discussion of the moral value of education. However, that dialogue is beyond the scope of this article and must be held elsewhere.

The Third Way initiative has profound implications for teachers. In the paradigm of 'performance management' (Boxley, 2003), teachers have a system of appraisal whereby a performance is rated against a prescribed criterion representing a national threshold (Boxley, 2003). As illustrated by the Davis (2000) study cited earlier, the regulatory 'cycle of target-setting, monitoring and reviewing' (Boxley, 2003, p. 3) is inhibiting teachers from using initiative to teach pupils creatively, as they are afraid of being unconventional in the eyes of the inspectorate. One of the key incentives for teachers to adhere to these standardisations is financial reward. There are five areas of standardisation that teachers are assessed in: 'Knowledge and Understanding, Teaching and Assessment, Pupil Progress, Wider Professional Effectiveness and Professional Characteristics' (Boxley, 2003, p. 4); there is not any hint of rewarding teacher creativity, initiative or professional judgement. The criteria for assessing teaching standards are so formalised that they assess the teachers' effectiveness at assessing!

The issue of trusting the teachers' competence is problematised with 'performance management' (Boxley, 2003). Standards testing is a far from benevolent process for teachers. The numerous performance indicators, or competency tests, issued by the state imply that teachers are incapable professionals – a contradiction in terms. The stranglehold on teachers is undermining the teachers' freedom to be creative in their teaching strategy. However, there is a fundamental rhetorical flaw in the expectation of teachers. The highly structured framework dissuades teachers from being creative and intuitive (Kimbell, 2000), but the Ofsted rationale statement reads: 'We must recognise innovation implies risk' (Clarke, 2002, p. 4); further on it reads: 'Inspection should value innovation ... we want to encourage creativity and new approaches to learning. Not all innovations will be successful and it is very important not to penalise schools for taking a risk with a particular innovation' (Clarke, 2002, p. 5).

The educational framework places such a strong emphasis on standards via the 'panoply of league tables and monitoring and accountability initiatives' (Kimbell, 2000, p. 209) that it really would require a brave teacher to challenge the performance tests and risk *failing*. The consequences of a teacher *failing* to reach a standard are substantial. If a teacher or his/her pupils do not measure up to the standards yardstick, it has adverse implications on professional development (financial and credential); it is seen to be weakening pupil progress (Boxley, 2003); and, ultimately, the school's league table standing is negatively affected, which in turn implicates intake potential, which influences funding (per capita). This exemplar shows the wider implications and pressures on teachers to conform. In sum, a teacher who is creative and celebrates creativity from pupils is a teacher who is willing to risk a great deal.

Of late, the 'Back to Basics' in education programme introduced by John Major in 1993 and, more recently, the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy are an indication that creativity in the education system continues to be marginalised (MacAskill, 1999). Despite their compulsory status, creative subjects such as design and technology have become subordinated, making way for more academic and vocational subjects. This is exemplified in the recent drive to equip national curriculum pupils with 'keys skills' such as citizenship, which has condensed an already overcrowded curriculum (Woodward, 2002). Subsequently, what we find in many schools is that creative subjects have been purged and replaced by the 'key skills' lessons (Woodward, 2002). The long-term effects of a non-creative curriculum can only be a matter of speculation, but one way to counteract this imbalance is to introduce a 'creative hour' (Wilby, 2002, p. 2).

In recent years the most influential study of creative education has been the Robinson Report, entitled *All Our Futures*. The report, commissioned by the National Advisory Committee on

Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE), heavily criticises the government's policy on the creative experience pupils receive in the education system: 'Creative ... education are [*sic*] being poorly served by the National Curriculum. The cumulative impact of successive changes in structure, organisation and assessment since its introduction have eroded provisions for ... creative approaches [in education]' (NACCCE, 2000, p. 5).

Earlier, this article considered the ways in which creative teaching and learning are discouraged by a system that is in favour of conformity and standardisation. The NACCCE (2000) recommends that teachers should adopt 'imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting, exciting and effective' (p. 6). The report goes on to suggest that teachers should be 'encouraging young people to believe in their creative potential and give them the confidence to try [and] identify ... their creative abilities and help them find their creative strengths; and foster ... their creativity by developing ordinary abilities and skills' (NACCCE, 2000, p. 6).

This citation from the NACCCE is the exact opposite of what actually happens in the classroom, as shown by the Davis (2000) study. The NACCCE report also attacks the government's policy on the testing regime in schools, the net value of which 'stifles' the creative process that subjects should be open to (NACCCE, 2000, p. 7). The report is interesting in that not once does it call for the repeal of any of the government's interventions such as the National Literacy Strategy; it does, however, provide a critical analysis and offers recommendations to ameliorate the education framework with a creative dimension. The report does also apply a great deal of pressure on New Labour to act on the recommendations; maybe this is why the report is not easily obtainable.

This section has considered how creativity has been, and continues to be, stifled in the education system. In the next section discussion revolves around how this discourse is, perhaps, being reversed.

2. Has Creativity Been Reprioritised in the Education Framework by New Labour?

The publication of the Plowden Report in 1967 (Department of Education and Science, 1967) was one of the first official reports to promote the desire for a creative element to be implemented in the school curriculum. After the Plowden Report, it was not until the 1990s that this opinion was expressed again within the proliferation of literature advocating the benefits of a creative dimension to the national curriculum (Jones, 2001).

One of the first indications of creativity being reinstalled as a priority in education was, paradoxically, the national curriculum. Although the framework of education became firmly rooted in a tight structure, the national curriculum introduced design and technology as a compulsory part of the school syllabus (Kimbell, 1997). More recently, directives from the central government appear to resemble a similar shift in ideology. Despite the introduction of 'key skills' subjects and New Labour's business agenda, which have served to narrow the national curriculum (Hill, 2002), former Home Secretary David Blunkett recognised that 'creativity is a vital part of children's education' (Blunkett, 2000, p. 2). The years of subordinating a creative curriculum now appear to be compensated by the introduction of measures that have elasticised the curriculum and reinstated creative elements in the school agenda. These are discussed later in this section.

The government is seemingly of the opinion that the educational imperative to raise standards can be harnessed by a creative dimension in the educational framework. Ministerial ideologues such as Blunkett (2000) have acknowledged that the national curriculum is inflexible and inhibits the facilitating of creativity. The 14-19 Green Paper's agenda to free the curriculum from its bureaucratic and overcrowded nature has propelled the idea of alleviating the school curriculum by reducing the number of core subjects (Hargreaves, 2002). The *Schools Achieving Success* White Paper released in 2001 also advocates the idea of releasing the national curriculum from its tight and highly structured framework. What resonates in this White Paper, and in the 14-19 Green Paper: *Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards*, is the constant reference to the importance of creative education. Although neither the White Paper nor the Green Paper explicitly state that we need a more creative approach in the school curriculum, they do, however, invite innovative pedagogy, more diversity in the classroom, deregulation and more flexibility for schools to be responsive to their particular climate (Department for Education and Skills, 2001). These reforms would, if

introduced fully, effectively recognise that creativity is an important part of pupils' development. The government's modernising agenda in these Green and White Papers suggests that the education structure is too constrictive and inhibits a broad and enriching educational experience for pupils.

Along with these legislative considerations, New Labour has introduced a number of incentives to relax the stranglehold of the national curriculum and widen the scope of education. The 'Culture, Media and Sport' project (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003), the 'Millennium Products' award (Blunkett, 2000), the establishment of the 'Science Year' programme (Department for Education and Skills, 2001b), and the 'Artsmark' initiative (Blunkett, 2000) are just a few among the numerous initiatives implemented to facilitate creativity in education. Perhaps the most influential governmental initiative to harness creativity in the education system was the establishment of the 'Innovation Unit' (Morris, 2002). The objective of this scheme is to 'collectively encourage teachers to take risks and innovate' (Morris, 2002, p. 21). In fact, the government has also applied pressure on teachers to be enterprising in their teaching strategy by including creativity as an aspect in the criteria that teachers are assessed by: 'Inspection should value innovation – as we move to a more diverse system with schools specialising and as they [teachers] gain more freedom and autonomy we want to encourage creativity and new approaches to learning' (Clarke, 2002, p. 5).

The recent evaluation of the national curriculum by government quangos, such as the NACCCE discussed earlier, has recommended an 'urgent' (NACCCE, 2000, p. 11) semi-overhaul of the way creativity is encompassed within education. Independent organisations such as the Nuffield Foundation (Barlex, 2003) have also rallied calls for the government to modernise the educational structure by fostering creativity as an integral component. The Nuffield Foundation proposes 12 recommendations for the education framework which 'can help young people to be creative in a complex, technical world where team work, entrepreneurship and risk taking are valued' (Barlex, 2003, p. 2).

It is not only think tanks and policy makers who are concerned with the lack of creativity in the education system. Educationalists have recognised that the lack of creativity in schooling is damaging to pupils' development. One of these scholars is Nash (1997), who claims creativity is an essential part of the development of early Key Stage pupils. Nash substantiates '[the] potential for greatness may be encoded in the genes, but whether that potential is realised as a gift ... depends on the patterns etched by experience in those critical early years' (Nash, 1997, p. 58).

Nash specifically refers to the early childhood phase of development because it is the early education Key Stages that are the most impressionable and influential developmental years for pupils (Stables, 1998). If pupils are allowed to flourish artistically and creatively during their early years, then a foundation for creative thinking will be laid for the development of creative intellect (Stables, 1998). Creativity and innovation have to be a part of pupils' development from as early as possible. Efland emphasises: 'Within 18 months of birth, the [child] ... enters into a stage of mirroring behaviours based on human interactions; maturation occurs based on these continued interactions and through images and language' (Efland et al, 1996, p. 26).

In this post-structuralist vein of thought, the national curriculum's narrow and academic scope will come to represent a restricted world view. The lack of creativity in the curriculum is inhibiting pupils from developing creative talents. Outerside (1993, p. 43) philosophises this notion by stating that 'we cannot begin to visualise what might be, if we have no perception of what is'. In Outerside's (1993) school of thought, the curriculum ought to be a vehicle to broaden horizons to see a broader picture of the world and provide enablement to conceive macroperspectives. The level of cognitive development in pupils is dependent on the schooling they receive; the broader and wider experiences are during Key Stages 1 and 2 will determine the resolution of the perspective that pupils have of the world. Creative thinking skills allow pupils to be lucidly unrestricted by cognitive boundaries and to indulge imaginatively in grandiose narratives. The notion of a camera lens can be used to exemplify this point: the lens that the child uses to engage with the world gets bigger and deeper through a creative education and, in this paradigm of enlightenment, the child is able to conceive more and more complex perspectives. In effect, this process of creative thinking at an early age is educating the mind to be emancipated, which enables a broader understanding of the way the world works through metacognitions that allow the child's

mind to operate outside his or her system of convention (Crevar, 2001). By this token, the restrictive nature of the national curriculum has a potential net result of creating a nation of conformist and uncreative people with a lack of innovation (Efland et al, 1996).

It has been argued by Stables (1998) that a creative element in the curriculum is not only imperative for the development of Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils, but the creative and innovative talents acquired during infancy and the junior education years become sterile during the latter part of the teenage years. With age, the brain begins to decrease the rate of hypertrophy of synapses, which means that the brain's capacity to acquire knowledge and conceive broad and creative ideas will slow down, and eventually begin to degenerate (Stables, 1998). Once a child reaches its teens, the growth and effectiveness of synapses deteriorate and skills such as creativity begin a phase of atrophy and fade if they are not used regularly (Nash, 1997). However, if these skills were not acquired in the first instance, then it would take a great deal longer to learn them afresh rather than to become reacquainted with them (Nash, 1997). Therefore, an element of creativity is essential in the early Key Stages for pupils to acquire creative skills, whilst a creative education for teenagers helps to maintain these skills.

Recently, there has been a growing consensus among educationalists that creativity is peremptory for problem solving skills (Stables, 1998). Creative people can overcome setbacks and adversities because creativity promotes intuition, risk taking and reflexive action (Stables, 1998), which are also desirable prerequisites for employers. Hailed as the 'Father of Creativity' and designer of the 'Torrance Test of Creative Thinking' (Crevar, 2001, p. 2), Paul Torrance also subscribes to the notion that creativity is a catalyst for the acquisition of transferable knowledge and skills: 'Creativity is not just an extravagance or embellishment of personality; it is a critical life skill' (Crevar, 2001, p. 4).

The 'child-centred', individualistic approach adopted in creative education compliments the liberal-progressive ideology of educationalist John Dewey (Dewey, 1944). The defining principle of his theory places the learner at the heart of the curriculum, and tailors the content and teaching strategies to the pupil's needs in order to facilitate learning. The learner is encouraged to use initiative and creativity, and to pragmatically find solutions by experimenting to overcome challenges (Dewey, 1944). Perhaps this notion was best conceptualised by Entwistle: 'This concept [child-centred learning] was popularised by Dewey who stressed the heuristic value of "the forked-path situation": learning is most likely to follow when a person finds himself in the sort of dilemma represented, metaphorically, as a parting of ways' (Entwistle, 1970, p. 145).

Bruce (1991) has further argued that a stimulating educational experience can be facilitated via a curriculum enriched with creativity. Creative learning incorporates an enjoyable and exciting dimension to learning, which in turn is inspiring and motivating (Fallows & Ahmet, 1999). This is especially applicable to early Key Stage pupils, because creativity encompasses 'play and fantasy', which are essential components of learning (Stables, 1998, p. 5).

Creativity is a pedagogic vehicle to promote learning; it encourages avant-garde expressionism by permitting pupils to jump into the unknown and take risks. A creative curriculum's postmodern epistemological perspective is 'non-linear ... and highly interpretive' rather than a prescripted process of learning (Freedman, 1996, p. 48). The nature of a creative curriculum would encourage pupils and teachers to be less preoccupied with reaching benchmarks, and to concentrate on advocating positivity in place of constriction. This notion was astutely articulated by Lord Herman Ouseley, who stated that: 'you cannot achieve anything without risk. You have nothing to fear but the risk' (Ouseley, 2003).

This section has emphasised some evidence of a shift in attitude that signifies a revaluing of creativity in education. The next section will provide a summary of the main points presented in this article, and conclude by offering further avenues of research.

Summary

This article has endeavoured to provide a cursory glance at the status of creativity in the education system. The first section demonstrated how creativity has historically been subordinated to the traditionalistic, narrow and vocational approach to education adopted by various governments.

The potted history, from the Ruskin speech to the present government's interventions, exemplified how education has evolved to become increasingly centralised and standardised.

The central focus of this section was directed at illuminating the problems associated with a curriculum infatuated with standards testing and quality assurance rubber-stamping. The Davis (2000) study was used to illustrate the effect that the provisions of standardisation and centralisation had on the teacher and learner. The Davis (2000) study was used to exemplify how the melee of performance and standards indicators had a Big Brother effect on teachers and learners, which marginalised creative pedagogy. It is important to note that the framework for education really concentrates on the physical aspects of learning; however, emotional creativity is almost completely disregarded and needs further attention in the context of this debate.

This article then drew parallels between Prime Minister James Callaghan's approach to education in 1976 and New Labour's current ideology. The Third Way political orientation was considered at some length, and the effect that its global economic agenda has on teachers and learners. Boxley's (2003) 'performativity' theory was applied to this context, which showed how the Third Way has exacerbated the problem of a rigid curriculum that emphasised principles of standardisation.

The drive for 'key skills' was analysed with the continuation of the 'Back to Basics' (MacAskill, 1999) program via the addition of the National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy, which subsequently worsened the problem of an overcrowded academic and vocational curriculum, with the result that there was a smaller allocation for creativity in the curriculum. The problem of an oversubscribed curriculum was cited from the NACCCE report, which also substantiated how the provisions of standardisation and centralisation, and a congested curriculum were stifling creativity.

The chief objective of this section was to provide examples of how the interventions of vocationalisation, standardisation and centralisation, and the 'key skills' drive made the nature of the national curriculum too structured, not allowing creative pedagogy.

The second section looked at how the discourse of academic and vocational learning is slowly being compensated by the implementation of various initiatives aimed at promoting creativity. As illustrated by these examples, the status of creativity in the education system has ascended. On the face of it, it would appear that these are positive interventions; however, the problem of an uncreative schooling experience has not been tackled comprehensively, because many of the initiatives are just cosmetic changes to education and do not penetrate the fundamentals of the problem. Schemes such as the 'Science Year' programme (Department for Education and Skills, 2001) are divorced from the national curriculum, and they are merely supplementary activities that do not affect what goes on in schools, which is where the problem lies.

As this article has illustrated, the issue of creative education is complex, and one that does not lend itself to simplistic ideas. A fundamental question that emerged from this study inquires about the purpose and function of education, which in turn defines whether the role of creativity in education ought to be emancipatory or driven by an economic agenda. There are two pertinent theories about the objective of education. The first is advocated by educationalists in section two of this article, who believe education ought to provide a well-rounded and broad curriculum to enrich the educational experience of pupils. The second ideology is fostered by New Labour, who believe education is a means to a prosperous economy as part of the grand narrative of globalisation.

The author of this article is anchored firmly with the former system of belief. This article was not written for the purpose of advocating a clarion call for a laissez-faire curriculum of yesteryear, or to rally pleas to dismantle the existing structure and replace it with a Summerhill school or Frensham Heights school type of spontaneous curriculum (Neill, 1962). However, the role of education ought to be as a vehicle to emancipate the minds of pupils, to encourage improvisation, allowing the pupil to be assertive. Pupils should be educated to seize control of their lives and foster an autonomous and responsible role, rather than be constrained by a vocational schooling experience. The educational framework should not be bound by a plethora of testing shackles, which pressurise teachers to teach learners knowledge to pass assessments. Rather, education should open up a hive of opportunities which may be pursued in life. The enclosed program of study in the current system is rigid and lifeless rather than eclectic and forward-looking, providing a rounded and innovative educational experience.

A fundamental problem now facing any modernisation of the education framework to facilitate creativity is the accountability culture that has been imposed on teachers since James Callaghan's Ruskin speech in 1976. To release the grip of the hand of history on teachers will take years of changing the non-trusting attitude of pupils to trust teachers for support; of changes to make teachers feel autonomous, and the system to in turn trust teachers. This is the real challenge facing those who realise the potential benefits of a creative education.

It is important to acknowledge that this article is by no means a comprehensive analysis; it is only a stimulant to encourage debate and highlight the importance of locating creativity in the curriculum. Conclusive evidence to support or refute the arguments presented in this debate requires considerable further study, taking into account projects such as 'Young Foresight' (Barlex, 2003), theories such as 'Multiple Intelligence' (Gardner, 1993) and 'Liberal Progressive Education' (Dewey, 1944), and views of worthwhile *knowledge* (Hirst, 1974). Future research needs to investigate the benefits of a creative education in more detail, the demoralisation of the teaching profession, the assessment of creativity and how a business agenda fits with objectives of education (Jones, 2001). Maybe there is also a space to study who is allowed to be creative? Maybe there is a class, gender and 'race' discussion to be had about creative education? The debate about the legitimacy of standards is also a road for further investigation: are the standards a true reflection of attainment? Or are they just publicly digestible propaganda tools for the government?

There will always be rhetorical discussions about the nature of education and how to implement changes, but what is for sure is that an unrestrictive creative education system is the life-support machine for a creative and innovative society. This melioristic ideal can only be achieved by the [re]modernisation of the educational framework to allow for creative principles. The idealism of afore is located in Aristotelian ideology, which states: 'the roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet' (Aristotle, 1962).

Notes

[1] It is important to note that child-centred education is an all-encompassing term, and progressive educationalists often differed with its exact definition (see Entwistle, 1970).

[2] There is room here to discuss Howard Gardner's (1993) 'Multiple Intelligence Theory', which says that human beings learn in very different ways to one another, and it is impossible to standardise and encapsulate all the variations in a simplistic system without it being exclusive.

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