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Different track - same destination? **Exploring the potential of 'Curriculum for Excellence'** to improve educational practice in Scotland.

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Abstract

This paper provides a commentary on the current opportunities open to policy makers and educators in developing the new national Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) for Scotland. It identifies areas of commonality between educational professionals from different sectors around the notion of curriculum. It explores different interpretations of the concept of curriculum and uses examples from informal education to highlight how youth workers and teachers could develop useful ways of working together. Further, the paper argues that an expression and prioritisation of values within the CfE policy provides the platform on which they can work more closely together in spite of their historically different pedagogical starting points. Ultimately, the paper seeks to convince both sectors that the CfE can be used creatively to offer an enhanced educational experience for young people in Scotland based on equity and social justice. This is an important and current issue for Education in Scotland and it is a debate which needs to be articulated, if we are to succeed in delivering a service which matches the aspirations of our nation and our young people.

Key words: education, curriculum, youth work, schools, values.

Introduction

For many educationalists, curriculum debates have been located in the formal education sector, within the school setting, and concerned with the conceptualization, interpretation and application of the concept. These discussions have been informed by classic texts which theorized notions of curriculum (Dewey, 1916; Stenhouse, 1975; Pring, 1976; Kelly, 1989).

Whilst these articulations have concentrated on school education, similar debates have taken place in informal education settings such as youth work. In Scottish schools, the new Curriculum for Excellence offers a chance for the youth workers and teachers to work together as it offers a challenge to identify common ground based on shared values and the common purposes of education. Traditionally, explicit, generic, value statements have consistently overarched expressions of the nature and purpose of informal learning through youth work, community education/community learning and development and as Gillies (2006) points out the underpinning values of the proposed (CfE) curriculum' are given high prominence. It is argued in this paper that this common focus on values offers the basis for a greater professional engagement between these sectors through the role of 'process' to determine the nature and direction for CfE curriculum.

In order to develop this argument, this paper explores the nature and purpose of education and identifies three main traditional perspectives which explain the role of curriculum. It also utilizes an historical and theoretical approach to identify the benefits of developing a new curriculum, based upon informal ideas and approaches. Finally, it advocates for recognition of both formal and informal approaches to enact the spirit of the CfE policy aspirations, to identify and work on the common ground of expressed shared values and to help create a participative society worthy of its young people.

The debate on the structure and function of curriculum in schools

The word 'curriculum' derives from the Latin language and a literal translation denotes its meaning as 'running course' (http://oxforddictionaries.com) or 'track' as it was used to explain the route which a young person took in order to mature and become a citizen. The first educational text which made reference to the term 'curriculum' was printed less than 100 years ago by the American educator, Franklin Bobbitt (Bobbitt 1918). From this primary source, we draw out five relevant ideas about the nature and purpose of education. These are the importance of social change, a challenge to traditional notions of education, a debate on quality of life or the ability to produce, social play versus mental play and opportunities to inculcate citizenship.

First, in the preface of *'The Curriculum'* Bobbit (1918), highlights the need for education to keep abreast of the challenges created by the rapid pace of change in American society. This social change has continued unabated into the second millennium with insatiable demands placed on educationalists to deliver a relevant and sophisticated curriculum. This recognition of active social change accords strongly with one of the central texts which delineates a rationale for community education in Scotland, within which much youth work practice has been located for the past 35 years. Ostensibly a review of adult education, *'Adult Education: The Challenge of* Change' (1975) was nevertheless, the rationale for bringing together the practices of youth and community workers and adult educators to form a Community Education Service. This new educational service was deemed necessary in response to large changes in society such as, technological advances, economic development and social structure. Most notably though, the report states that when considering social change proactive actions are required based on the anticipated 'trends and directions' (SED 1975, pp.18-19).

Second, in his deliberations, Bobbit (1918, p.iv) referred to the old ideas of schools being 'mainly devoted to filling the memory with facts', although he argued that education needed to consider a much wider set of functions. Clearly influenced by the work of Dewey in 'Democracy and Education' (1916) two years earlier, he states that 'Education is now to develop a type of wisdom that can only grow out of participation in the living experiences of men, and never out of mere memorization of verbal statements of facts' (ibid). This development in formal educational thinking moves away from what Paulo Freire (1970) recognised as 'banking education' which was about depositing knowledge into people's heads. Instead, he holds that 'people could learn social and political responsibility only by experiencing that responsibility, through intervention in the destiny of their children's schools' (Freire, 1974).

Third, he recognised a debate, in educational circles, concerning its purposes which sound remarkably contemporary. On the one side (sides are relevant here as he writes about the discussion as being 'antagonistic') are those who 'look to subjective results… [to whom] the

purpose of education is the '*ability to live'* rather than the practical '*ability to produce'* (the italics are Bobbitt's) and those who believe that 'education is to look primarily and consciously to efficient practical action in a practical world' (Bobbitt, 1918, p.3). He therefore poses the debate on the purpose of education, 'for culture' or 'for utility' that he eventually decided were necessary in both forms of education. Both youth workers and teachers will recognise the contemporary equivalent debate around the 'new vocationalism' so prevalent in UK education since the 1980's, to meet the needs of industry, moving away from earlier concerns about equality for social change. It could be argued that the over emphasis on the economic function of education undermines the important personal and civic roles with which education is concerned and democratic society needs.

Interestingly, Bobbit draws a distinction between two meanings of the word 'play' in relation to educational activity. He identifies the first aspect as one concerned with 'social play' which he refers to as 'nature's active method of social education' and posits that this form of play is a necessary facet of young people's growth and development. The second facet he describes as 'mental play' which he explains is the 'basis for intellectual education'. From these beginnings we can identify the root of the debate for education to balance learning activities between intellectual stimulation and recognising the value of social and cultural situated learning (Bobbit 1918, p. 8-9).

Finally, in part three of his book, he concerns himself with 'Education for Citizenship' using essentially the Darwinian model of 'survival of the fittest' to describe the move from primitive to modern societies through the development of the nation state. He understands citizenship as 'large-group consciousness' and civic education for young people which 'must come from participation along with adults' (Bobbit 1918, p.142). He argues further that school needs to be at the forefront of developing education for citizenship but that 'it must be an organic part of the total civic striving of the community…grounded in reality' (ibid 1918, p.151). Again, we can see here the beginnings of recognising the importance placed on education's role in supporting the development of society and encouraging students to participate and contribute to their community. These identified issues about the nature and purpose of education will significantly influence the pedagogical approaches and the manner in which curriculum is perceived and organised.

Views about the structure and function of the curriculum have been the source of debate in educational circles since the establishment of organised schooling. There are many definitions and interpretations on what constitutes a curriculum, but useful to our discussion here we present the definition offered by Kerr and noted by Kelly who defines curriculum as, 'all the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school' (Kelly (1983, p. 10).

Following on from Bobbitt (1918) and Dewey (1916), there are at least three main traditions which dominate the discussion on the nature and role of curriculum. Kelly (2004) identified three models for curriculum planning with subsequent pedagogical methods:

1. Curriculum as content and education as transmission
2. Curriculum as product and education as instrument
3. Curriculum as process and education as development.

The first recognisable articulation of curriculum is delineated to equate with the transmission of a syllabus. This is a view which privileges content and subject matter and leads to a

pedagogical approach which focuses on getting the pre-determined message across and into the learner. This view of education is mainly concerned with the modes and techniques of transmission.

The second main understanding of curriculum is dominated by those who equate curriculum with product. This is a view which will resonate with policy makers and many current school based educationalists across the UK as it is consistent with the drive for New Public Management which has dominated public policy since the early 1980's (Clarke & Newman, 1997). It is an approach which is based on setting objectives, planning and delivering inputs and evaluating the outcomes. From this viewpoint, education is a functional activity which aims to provide students with experiences for life and work rather than encouraging an inquisitive mind and inculcating ways of exploring complex problems and issues.

The third tradition holds that curriculum is about process. From this viewpoint, curriculum is concerned with meaningful interactions and relationship building through the dynamic creation of knowledge. It is an active and continuous process generated between the student, teacher and the knowledge generated. In this way of working, the educators adopt a flexible approach within guiding learning principles which frames the knowledge creation. The process based curriculum generates constructed, student relevant conversations, reflects on current actions and tailors the next learning steps based on the knowledge already created. In this role, the educator is more facilitator than provider of learning and the student is more in control of the level and pace of the learning. In this endeavour the educator becomes more of a co-author to the collective interactive learning efforts of the class in a particular setting and at a set moment in time.

The articulation of these different perspectives opens up the possibility that there may be different ways of viewing curriculum and that perhaps educators, operating from different theoretical stances and in different settings, can learn from one another by developing a synthesised understanding of curriculum which is beneficial to both learners and educational professionals. If the current educational policy in Scotland, through 'Curriculum for Excellence', is asking educators to move away from modes of behaviour modification to a more empowering experience of education, then what is it about the current school curriculum that needs to change? In search of an answer we first explore the aims and aspirations of the current Government's education policy.

The current educational discourse: Curriculum for Excellence

'Curriculum for Excellence' offers new challenges for all educators, including teachers and youth workers in schools, which again opens up the debate about the constitution of the curriculum. Curriculum for Excellence is the Scottish Government's current education policy developed by a Curriculum Review Group which aimed to de-clutter the curriculum, make better connections, offer more choices and make it fun (CfE, Curriculum Review Group 2004a).

This policy aims to develop a holistic, integrated, broad based curriculum around the four personal capacities of 'successful learner, confident individual, responsible citizen and effective contributor'. (Scottish Executive, 2004) This policy is a fundamental shift from the previous 5-14 programme, which was concerned with subject knowledge, to a focus on developing the capacities of all young learners. This new approach recognizes that in order to be a successful learner, the student needs to be motivated, have high expectations and be

open to new ideas and different ways of thinking. There is also recognition that for students to be confident, they must have a secure level of self -respect, well being, values, beliefs and ambition. Further, if young people are to become responsible citizens then they need to respect others and participate in economic, social, political and cultural life. Again, for these students to make an effective contribution they require an enterprising attitude and to be resilient and self-reliant (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010).

Although the CfE is described as the most important development within schooling for some time, it is not without its critics. Priestley and Humes (2010) criticise it for failing to take account of the body of knowledge around curriculum theory, some of which has been presented in this paper. They argue that by not taking an historical view, the curriculum as presented contains many contradictions and fails to learn the lessons of the past which, they assert, could undermine the whole project. Drawing on Kelly's (1999) models for curriculum planning, they note that although CfE implies a 'process curriculum', this is never made explicit, and there is a lack of a clear articulation of purpose to support a process curriculum. However, they acknowledge that the four capacities describe the sort of young person envisaged by this development and they could be viewed as potential principles of a process curriculum. This lack of articulation leaves it vulnerable, especially with the decision to retain expressions of sequences of outcomes. In this regard it is more akin to what Kelly has referred to as a 'mastery curriculum'- a combination of a content based curriculum and an aims and objectives model- that will ultimately lead to little change in practice at school level.

It is important to note that the CfE has a number of other critics who pose questions and call for change in both the pedagogy and curriculum. However, these critics, who have circulated their criticisms through using a variety of new media, using the internet, film and YouTube, are largely ignored by the establishment. Could this be because the politicians, policy makers and chief education officers are not influenced by the new media in the same way as they are with a letter in their favourite broadsheet? If so, what does this imply about their ability to devise a relevant curriculum based on the needs, aspirations and current technological profile of our young people today?

This begs a further two key questions; which type of curriculum would best suit these aspirations and what educational attitudes and practices would facilitate the change to a new curriculum? To answer this we turn to the approaches adopted by informal, community educators.

The history of curriculum within informal education

Historically, youth workers and other informal and community educators have adopted a less structured approach to both the idea and organisation of curriculum, although there have been exceptions within the community education strands of adult education and particular types of youth work e.g. the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. In general terms, youth workers, over the past thirty years, have danced with notions of curriculum when it suited the practice but only recently has the conceptual and intellectual territory been more fully covered.

Across recent youth work literature concerned with informal education approaches we can identify at least three different interpretive stances on the validity and usefulness of curriculum. These three camps, and their respective stances, are embodied in the work of Jeffs and Smith, (1990 &1999) who articulate that there is no place for curriculum in

informal practice: Merton and Wylie (2002) who advocate for a youth work curriculum based on a traditional framework of content, pedagogy and assessment: and Ord (2007) who promotes the importance of developing an authentic youth work curriculum based on a questioning approach and emergent outcomes. We now consider each in more detail.

Jeffs & Smith are very clear that any notion of curriculum which is concerned with pre-determined content is highly problematic for informal educators. They can see a role for understanding the broad context, principles and ethos of the learning but not for a detailed content in advance. Thus, the informal educator engages without a specific agenda on particular action to be taken which emerges during the encounter. In fact, they do not like the notion of curriculum at all as it was a concept generated for organising school work and therefore that is the dominant, specific context for its use. However, at least part of this argument is problematic because youth workers are increasingly working in a school context. However, what Jeffs & Smith would rightly question is whether the work that they undertake in schools is still in keeping with the principles of youth work practice Jeffs & Smith (1990; 1999).

In contrast, Merton & Wylie argue for a 'content' approach and hold that this is not problematic because they are identifying young people's issues and concerns which are well known and using these as topic to generate learning outcomes. They therefore promote a youth work curriculum that is comprised of four key elements; 'emotional literacy, creativity and enterprise, health and wellbeing and active citizenship'. This model supports a pedagogy which is based on educational group work and experiential learning with real life problems, reflected and acted upon. It also advocates for the establishment of performance criteria to judge the success of the learning outcomes (Merton & Wylie (2002, p. 23). It could be argued that this is a model which is influenced by the instrumental policy approach of New Public Management which does not allow for the full consideration to the developmental, generative process of youth work.

The third curriculum stance is articulated by Ord (2007) who promotes the idea that curriculum should be promoted in terms of its usefulness as a concept as well as the extent to which it helps to facilitate learning. In this regard, he identifies curriculum as an important mechanism for communicating, legitimising and developing the educational practice and promotes the role of culture as an important aspect of learning. He posits that one of the main purposes and benefits of curriculum is to enable 'communication, dialogue and agreement about practice amongst the workers in a given locality', which is rooted in Lave and Wenger's notions of the 'community of practice' (in Ord 2007, p.111). Ord recognises that the type of curriculum utilised will emanate from the type of operational model that is adopted overtly or unarticulated. For youth work he recognises Hurley and Treacy's (1993) sociological models for youth work as character building, personal development, critical social education and radical social change. He argues that the youth work curriculum is underpinned in the two central models of personal development and critical social education and that youth workers operate across both perspective. Perhaps these two models provide an interface for teachers and youth workers to work within the school environment.

What is interesting in all three interpretations is that curriculum is not just about organising content. It is concerned with Governmental expectations, pedagogical beliefs, understandings and approaches and its determination has a significant effect on whether young people encounter either a positive or negative learning experience. This shows us that there are many influences over the learning process and that, if education is to be successful, the learner

needs to be the primary consideration. We hold that education works best when the learners' needs are placed at the heart of the educational process and when they have a significant degree of control over the content and pace of the learning.

Curriculum: pre-determined or organic?

The role and control of the learner in education brings into sharp focus whether the content of the curriculum should be decided by others in advance or whether knowledge can be equally and successfully generated through interaction and dialogue. Often, the starting point, when working with the notion of curriculum, is underpinned by the belief that it both entails a pre determined directiveness and a lack of appreciation for starting from where people are at. If the curriculum is set out in advance then it is difficult to see the ways in which the learners can gain control and participate fully. This predetermined approach may not be as helpful to all learners and may lead to a significant number of learners engaging with the learning in a passive acceptance manner or in a passive/active resistance way which can be disruptive to the norms of engagement and often results in a negative/resentful experience for the learner. Thus, this top down pre-determined and fixed interpretation of the nature and purpose of curriculum can lead to ignoring the potential usefulness of developing an organic process based curriculum. What could be useful here is to draw out a curriculum which would be best suited to deliver on the aspirations of a Curriculum for Excellence and satisfy the needs of young people, youth workers and teachers.

Understanding the informal and formal traditions

The origins of ideas about the role and purposes of education and the place of curriculum have been highlighted earlier but it may be useful at this point to look at further points of convergence to supplement the developing argument.

Kelly is an important figure in educational thinking in the UK and the book 'Curriculum' has been widely appreciated by educators at the more formal end of the spectrum. As mentioned earlier, he noted different models underpinning approaches. Citing the contribution of Stenhouse he states that the starting point is to define value positions to 'provide a clear view of the principles on which the planning was founded'. He also refers to the work of Pring who urges teachers to 'seek agreement on the principles of procedure' to guide any approach to curriculum and not to 'specify goals' Kelly (1989, p. 88). Unless we get to the values that lie under our actions, we cannot bring together the traditions of 'rational curricular planning with education as development', in a clear nod to Dewey and Bobbitt. Community educators have long argued the importance of this approach with value statements explicitly found in documents such as 'Professional and Occupational Standards for Youth work' (2008) and current policy 'Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities' (Scottish Executive 2004b). These include such aims and values as self-determination and the rights of the individual along with equality, citizenship and democracy.

The informal / formal education is often characterised as a binary but this is not really helpful as informal educators often use formal methods and vice versa. The notion of a continuum seems more sensible; indeed, this was recognised by Dewey (1916, p.81) as he advocated a way of maintaining a 'proper balance between the informal and the formal'. However, it should be noted that his views on what constituted informal education would align more closely to what we would now call 'informal learning' or the learning which happens, with the attendant reflective processes, in everyday life. In this situation, there is no external

purposeful educator, which is in keeping with Dewey's (1916, p.64) views on democracy and education that emphasise the implications of 'human association', a key idea in the work of Jeffs and Smith (1999). In their book, '*Informal Education',* the importance of people being with one another and learning from each other is detailed as a fundamental aspect of the work which Dewey (1916) recognised and linked to society and community.

All three concepts of association, conversation and need, are at the core of youth work and informal education. Association and conversation mean that ideas can flow that can be used as the basis of further discussion to assist learning. To the youth worker, these are tools that require skilful use and detailed understanding of purposefulness. To the uninitiated, it can look, at a surface level, as talking or 'chit chat' for no apparent reason. To the informal educator, it is the bedrock of practice which is directed at engaging learners in things they state are of interest and worth to them. Not that these are unproblematic concepts in themselves, but association and conversation around interests and needs, can be powerful.

The importance of these informal associations are recognised by Dewey when writing about democracy. He rails against any view that democracy is only to do with choosing governments and that it is mainly about 'a mode of associated living, of conjoint, communicated experience'. To the practical empiricist Dewey, the role of experience and learning from it, though problematic, was crucial and he advocated play in a similar way that Bobbitt had argued. Experiential learning, in both senses of reflecting upon past experience and learning from it and organising experiences to learn from the present, is used extensively in youth work (Dewey 1916, p.68).

The common bond of values with respect equity and social justice

Although fundamental questions about the nature of curriculum are not addressed in the CfE document, as Priestley and Humes (2010) note, this job has been done elsewhere. The 'Education (Scotland) Act of 2000' identified five national priorities Education: Achievement and Attainment; Framework for Learning; Inclusion and Equality; Values and Citizenship; and Learning for Life. This provides a legal framework on which to argue for an equalities and value based curriculum which is societal focused and lifelong.

The importance of values has been long associated with many community based educative practices. Both personal and professional values have played a strong role in shaping educative practice as we hold that values shape who we are and how we act. We recognise that these are social, relative and culturally dependent but we align these with the principles of respect, equity and social justice which help to mitigate and transcend the limitations. It is only through recognising our own limitations as educators that we are able to reach out meaningfully to others.

This is certainly an opportune time to consider which understanding of curriculum would help our educators and young people to develop capacities which will be of significant benefit to both themselves and society. Here we outline a process based 'values' curriculum with the ideals and principles on which a dynamic, interactive and successful curriculum can be based and explore the pedagogical thinking and action that translates these into practice.

As a starting point we take the principles of equity and social justice, which offer ground where formal and informal approaches can seek to complement development possibilities for all young people. If we are serious about all children being successful learners, confident

individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors then the curriculum needs to accommodate change. Both teachers and youth workers want to see young people develop and flourish in a safe environment where young peoples' rights are respected and their aspirations realized. Youth workers can bring much to this refreshed curriculum based on the principles that all young learners have the right to negotiate what success means and to build confidence based on knowledge which is meaningful and seen to be relevant to their lives. Youth workers will also encourage young people to name and interpret their own world and to take action based on their understanding of and their developing commitments to that world.

A practical example of this approach is offered by Coburn (2010, p.37) when reflecting on an international exchange visit in the 1980's which details how the young people followed a 'problem posing' pedagogy. This dialogical approach did not provide answers to the young people's fear of meeting strangers, but created a learning context which enabled them to create their own knowledge, understanding and solutions.

However, this type of contribution by youth workers is not enough as a singular practice and needs to be built in across the curriculum. Again, for the capacity of students to flourish, all educators must seek out the outdated, institutional school modes which inadvertently undermine the gains made through the curriculum. For example, the inequitable and deficit discipline codes, and the meritocratic honours that privilege particular types of students and learning, need to be replaced by respect, recognition and plaudits which are not based on individual competition but on cooperation and collective efficacy. Of course, these are serious structural and pedagogical issues but it does not follow that learning, and hence the overall student experience, has to be difficult or gloomy. In fact, if the schooling experience is not both challenging and rewarding then there is something wrong with the system, not the individual. Educators serve students well when they help to create a non threatening learning environment that encourages autonomy with a willingness to make mistakes thereby building their confidence in people and the learning process (Littlewood, 1996).

This will require changes to structures and thinking to generate learning which is fun for all and behavioral difficulties can dissolve when a person is not forced to be involved in an activity that is viewed as useless. Instead when a learner understands and agrees the purpose, then learning is much more interesting, enjoyable and valued.

Operationally, in this increasingly globalised world, with the movements across country borders, schools, to be effective, will need to embrace indigenous knowledge, a source that has often been ignored in western schools (McKinley et al, 2010) and starting from where the learner 'is at', will help in this endeavor. It is not acceptable for educators to dominate the educational process by presenting their own values and views of the world as being the terms through which success is judged and rewarded. We suggest that along with practice developments, language will need to support change by, for example, moving from an expectation of defined learning outcomes to thinking about negotiated learning intentions and aspirations.

Conclusion

The current educational discourse inherent within the Curriculum for Excellence, alongside recognition of the importance of shared values, provides an opportunity to re-think our aims and purposes of education. It also creates the possibility to combine best thinking and

practice from both traditions, to develop new practices within schools that value equally the young people, the teachers and the youth workers.

This is an argument for an education system that believes in young people and expects a great deal from them. We can no longer have the main aims of teaching being focused on pre-determined subject matter which serves to inculcate modes of obedience and conformity at the expense of purposeful engagement by creating meaningful learning experiences. This refreshed approach to learning will help to overcome the type of educational passivity which leads to a sense of fatalism and an over reliance on the state. We need to remind ourselves that we educate in a participatory democracy which wants its citizens to think for themselves, participate and be entrepreneurial. Also, this will only happen when we listen and value young people as they become open to the possibility of making a contribution which can effect sustained change. This will only happen if all educators, teachers and youth workers open themselves up to questioning and constructed conversations (Packham 2008, p.73) which creates a dialogue which is relevant, interesting and challenging as well as the basis for further learning.

We have presented a view of curriculum which encourages people in a democratic society to think about their lives, identify the issues of concern to them and to consider how these unhelpful circumstances could be changed. Surely, this is a worthwhile endeavour that will benefit society through encouraging the maximum human development of each and every person. These old and new ideas are presented as a challenging stimulus, for both formal and informal educationalists to think about their practice. Finally, we conclude that although on different tracks we seek the same destination as all educators journey to make education a useful, rewarding, lifelong activity that enhances the quality of life for all participants and nourishes the society in which we live.

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