

A Curriculum for excellence debate

Like everyone else I have embraced the spirit and intentions of the Curriculum for Excellence that undoubtedly has the capacity to re-invigorate the teaching profession. In particular I welcome the agreed aims about a wider conception of education.

The programme itself is framing the questions that it thinks need to be considered. . Because of its profound implications schools need to find time to think carefully for themselves about how it will work in practice. When our roads are being improved it causes delays but in schools normal service is always expected while improvements are being made.

Am I the only person who would like to know where the four capacities came from and what is their theoretical basis? Of the 18000 words in our vocabulary to describe our character, why chose these? The uncritical acceptance is a disappointing start to the re-democratisation of schooling. I'm sure everyone could think of other capacities. I'd add caring. Do we really want a nation of confident, successful, effective and responsible daleks! Understandably we have ended up with a basic set of capacities, but they are deceptively simple. Ask twenty teachers what confidence means and you'll get twenty different answers.

The curriculum is crucial but there are other equally crucial components of the educational experience. For me, it doesn't do justice to the centrality of classroom climates. Teachers affect pupils more through the climate they create than the curriculum. Pupils internalise a school's values through identification with teachers who meet their needs through their classroom climate. Pupils learning experiences are also significantly mediated by relationships with their peer group.

I get little sense of the transaction between the pupil and curriculum, as if the curriculum is of importance in its own right. It seems to me to be all about teaching the curriculum. The Child has been put to one side.

Some teachers think they have little responsibility for creating the climate that engages pupils in learning. ACfE gives the high moral ground to these teachers and reinforces a teacher identity based on subject teaching, when it's time to move on to an identity based on broader values. Paradoxically delivering the capacities will require teachers to give more of themselves.

Since the outcomes are psycho social, so the process needs a psychological analysis. To deliver outcomes we need to consider the capacities young people require to adapt to school in the first place. These include self-awareness and reflection about yourself knowing what teachers want from you and how teachers see you a sense of control over your school life and social competence to meet needs for social acceptance.

The programme fails to capture a sense of what children are like, their needs and motives, crucially how they feel about themselves and their

learning. This creates a representation of children as passive recipients. But pupils are active processor of values and beliefs and their subjective experiences is the major source of power in determining achievement. So much has been focused on pupil capacities as outcomes that ACfE may have forgotten their role in the actual learning process.

Despite the widespread consensus, I think it unwise to assume everyone is signed up for this vision. I have met substantial resistance in describing the most confident responsible pupils as 'harmoniously' engaged, with some concerns that this language is too 'flowery'. The second eye opener that has revealed to me unspoken barriers came in the form of hostility to the mastery attitude to achievement during in-service courses. It seems to echo the stigma attached to being the 'teacher's pet'. In an exercise that enacts a range of attitudes to achievement the consistent and astonishing response has been antagonism, albeit good natured towards the person representing the mastery attitude. We need to work out what this hostility is about.

Up till now the driving force has been for excellence in prescribed skills and we have celebrated success in these skills and ignored progress elsewhere. New measures to label talent must be important to pupils and better represent the real world. It is a pity personal achievement has been sidelined to out of school activities.

To ensure relevance the curriculum needs to tune into and build on pupils' goals and interests and connect with their sub-culture to know what they value about their life. The most important goal for schools is to launch pupils on a life long process that encourages them to find out who they want to be not who we think they ought to be.

Rather than imposing yet more of our values on the seemingly reluctant, the curriculum should take account of pupils' 'real life' experiences and challenges. An interesting exercise is to find out how many pupils can bring into school something they are proud of, that shows they have grasped the concept of achievement. Success has been to date defined through the teachers' eyes. Can ACfE change that?

NB: Children always seen thru the teachers'eyes, like the anphropomorphising of animals, reflects our obsession with putting ourselves at the centre of everything. When we look at pupils we see a mirror of ourselves as opposed to another person.

