

Changing the subject?

Challenging 'creativity' and 'emotional well-being' as educational goals

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Purposes of arts and creativity

- **cultural appreciation, induction**
- **skills and techniques**
- **therapy**
- **well-being and self-awareness**
 - **BTEC Performing Arts – ‘emotional memory exercises’**
 - **Entry to Employment – life and social skills classes ‘feelings cards’**
 - **AVCE Art – investigating and expressing your emotions; accessing ‘emotional issues’**
- **art in popular culture – Emin, Tapper, Gormley**

The argument

- **the rapid and unchallenged rise of politically-sponsored interventions for emotional well-being**
 - **‘therapeutic education’**
- **everyday accounts of emotional vulnerability, dysfunction and therapeutic education**
- **images of the diminished self**
- **instrumental subjects**

Political sponsorship of emotional well-being

- **growing influence of therapy, counselling, positive psychology, educational psychology, trauma and conflict theories**
- **specialist interventions**
 - **nurture groups, counselling, psychological assessments**
- **generic interventions**
 - **‘Angels’ and peer mentoring schemes**
 - **bully counsellors**
 - **drama-workshops**
 - **emotional audits**
 - **PSHE and circle time**
 - **diagnosis of self-esteem**
 - **learning support**
 - **resilience and ‘happiness’ lessons (from positive psychology)**
 - **restorative justice (from legal and aid contexts)**
- **formal and informal assessments**

Subjects as instruments

- **developing emotional and affective attributes, dispositions ('soft outcomes')**
 - **'learning to learn'**
 - **thinking skills**
 - **'assessment for learning'**
 - **collaborative learning**
 - **reflective practice/reflective learning**
 - **self-awareness and emotional literacy**
 - **understanding and managing relationships**
 - **creativity**

Influences and concerns

- **emotionally intelligent/literate citizens**
 - **‘reflexivity’ and self-awareness**
 - **emotional labour**
- **preventing mental ill-health; concerns about depression and unhappiness**
 - **a human right- UNICEF, OECD etc**
- **soft outcomes of learning**
 - **emotional capital/identity/psychological ‘capital’**
 - **confidence, self-esteem, emotional well-being**
- **combating test-driven, ‘over-rational’ curriculum**
- **social justice becomes a psychological concern**

Therapeutic assumptions in popular culture

- **life and education repress our 'true' emotional and authentic selves**
- **feelings are 'baggage' and barriers to life and learning**
- **we need to be able to express, discuss and manage our feelings with support**
- **those closest to us are often the cause of problems: therefore need professional support**
- **particular rituals, vocabulary, explanations can help us to express, manage feelings 'appropriately'**
- **behind our confident facades, we are all emotionally vulnerable**
- **expressing emotions to others is part of creativity, emotional well-being etc**

'Therapeutic' education

- **any activity that targets and elicits emotional aspects of life and learning, drawing on principles, assumptions and practices from different branches of therapy, psychology and counselling**
 - **extension from specialist interventions to everyday teaching, generic interventions and subject content**
- **therapeutic claims embedded in SEAL and other interventions (including ideas about creativity in learning) legitimised by positive psychology and neuroscience**
 - **competing 'legitimate' perspectives**

Positive psychology

shift from a negative view of emotionally vulnerable people

“The new century challenges psychology to shift ...its intellectual energy to the study of the positive aspects of human experience. A science of positive subjective experience, of positive individual traits, and of positive institutions, promises to improve the quality of life and also to prevent the various pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless.

The exclusive focus on pathology that has dominated so much of our discipline results in a model of the human being lacking the positive features, which make life worth living. Hope, wisdom, creativity, future mindedness, courage, spirituality, responsibility, and perseverance are either ignored or explained as transformations of more authentic negative impulses” (Seligman and Csiksentimihalyi 2000: 1).

Problems with current developments

- **rise of developments and disparate concerns**
 - *seem* similar to long-running concerns about affective, pastoral, emotional aspects of education
- **sweeping claims, dubious research evidence, elision of constructs and concerns**
 - powerful resonance with populist ideas
- **lack of critical debate about claims and suggested remedies**
- **organisations, books, courses and consultants, products**
 - an uncritical, eclectic, profitable industry
- **it is not being done by the right people with the right training**
- **integrate with subject teaching**

Promoting the diminished self

- **cultural perspective - human experience and everyday life is a source of emotional distress**
- **therapeutic ethos**
 - **exponential rise of interventions**
 - **mindset, vocabulary and set of assumptions – ‘cultural script’ to explain ourselves and others**
- **demoralisation and pessimism**
 - **fear of risk: social, scientific, personal**
 - **loss of belief in agency and potential**
 - **rise of interest in fragile identities**
 - **fear of our own and children’s futures (and present and past!)**
- **normalising fragility and need for ‘nurturing’ and ‘support’**

Implications

- **orthodoxy that people need professional support**
 - **expansion of conditions and behaviours**
 - **interventions and changes to pedagogy (time, preoccupation)**
 - **people cannot and will not learn unless learning is personally and emotionally relevant**
- **orthodoxy that we must address emotional well-being ‘before learning can take place’**
 - **undermines challenge and risk**
 - **institutionalises the ‘fragile’ learner**
- **ethical questions**
 - **intrusion, compulsion, assumptions, labels**

Changing the subject

- **fragility, dysfunction and ‘emotional illiteracy’**
 - **expressing and managing emotions ‘appropriately’**
- **practices elicit vulnerability, help people live with it**
 - **self-fulfilling prophecy**
- **creativity and well-being are *by-products* of meaningful activity**
 - **‘ask yourself if you are happy and you cease to be so...’ (John Stuart Mill)**
- **the diminished self needs State support**
- **a growing belief that people cannot be educated/ do not want education**
 - **instrumental subjects: activities and content for ‘soft’ outcomes**
 - **the self is the ‘subject’, the process and the outcome**
 - **‘learning’ not education**

Publications

- **Ecclestone, K. (2004) Learning or therapy?: the demoralisation of education, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54, 3, 129-147**
- **Ecclestone, K. and Hayes, D. (2008) *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education*, London: Routledge**
- **Ecclestone, K. (2007) Resisting images of the 'diminished self': the implications of emotional well-being and emotional engagement in educational policy, *Journal of Education Policy*, 22, 4, 455-470**
- **Ecclestone, K. and Hayes, D. (2009) Changing the subject?: the educational implications of emotional well-being, *Oxford Review of Education*, June 2009**
- **Ecclestone et al (2008-9) Emotional well-being and social justice: interdisciplinary perspectives, *ESRC Seminar Series*, Oxford Brookes University**