

Fostering Curriculum for Excellence teachers' freedom and creativity through developing their intuition and imagination: some insights from Steiner-Waldorf education

Iddo Oberski

Queen Margaret University

ABSTRACT

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in Scotland aims for young people to develop into responsible citizens, confident individuals, successful learners and effective contributors. It recognises teachers need more 'freedom to teach in innovative and creative ways' (Scottish Executive 2006a: 16). I argue that in the light of these proposals, changes are needed to the professional standards for teachers in Scotland and possibly also to teacher education courses, as teachers will need to become freer and more creative to allow them to exemplify the aims of CfE. However, even if understood in a common-sensical way, creativity and freedom are not currently explicit in the ITE Standards. Looked at with a deeper understanding of what creativity and freedom could mean, CfE could be seen as providing real opportunities for teachers and pupils alike, but ITE standards are then seriously lacking in addressing this. As the ideas of freedom and creativity have long been highly valued in the Steiner-Waldorf (SW) sector, I will draw on Steiner's philosophy of freedom to argue that the development of teachers' intuition and imagination should be the foundation for their creativity and freedom.

INTRODUCTION

Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), 'an executive non-departmental public body sponsored and funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department', (LTS 2008a) boldly stated on their website that in *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE), the 'biggest reform of education in a generation' is taking place in Scotland (LTS 2006: 3). CfE, aims to provide a 'streamlined' curriculum for young people aged 3-18, and is designed, on the basis of the findings from the 2002 National Debate on Education in Scotland to provide:

- More freedom for teachers.
- Greater choice and opportunity for pupils.
- A single coherent curriculum for all young people aged 3-18. (LTS 2007)

Further central aims of CfE are to enable all young people to become 'successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors' (LTS 2008b). Clearly, much promise is held out with respect to the potential of CfE for both pupils and teachers, and it is therefore important to engage with it at an early stage in an attempt to examine in some detail the substance of the claims and promises, as well as to think about how the aspirations – which clearly underlie CfE – may be accomplished.

A Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive 2004a) was published by the Curriculum Review Group. It was soon followed by a ministerial response (Scottish Executive 2004b) and an 'agenda for action' (Scottish Executive 2004c). In 2006, a progress and proposals document was published and then followed in 2007 and 2008 by further documents on building the curriculum (Scottish Executive 2006a, 2007a, 2007b; Scottish Government 2008). All these documents make some reference to the intended increase in teachers' freedom and, in parallel, to the requirement of them to become more creative and innovative. The consistent reference to freedom and creativity throughout the development of CfE can be seen in the following progressive sample of quotes:

The people best placed to make judgements about the learning needs of individual young people are those who work with them most closely. Within a framework of clear national standards and local authority support, teachers and other professionals in schools must have *the freedom to exercise their professional judgement* to deliver excellent learning and teaching. We will act to give them that freedom. (Scottish Executive, 2004c: 5, my emphasis) (see also pp.14-15)

There will be *freedom to teach in innovative ways* and to make the most of the power of digital learning and expertise outwith the school sector. (Scottish Executive 2006a: 31, my emphasis)

The children and young people of Scotland need teachers who *themselves* exemplify the four capacities... (Scottish Executive, 2007a: 1, my emphasis)

Further key points from this latter document are:

- offer new choice, space and time within the curriculum to teachers and schools to design learning to suit the needs of young people.
- achieving clearly defined rounded outcomes for young people.
- remove unnecessary content from the primary curriculum to free up space for innovation and creativity.
- Wider opportunities for teachers to teach across sectors.

(pp. 14-15)

And finally:

Curriculum areas are not structures for timetabling: establishments and partnerships have the *freedom* to think *imaginatively* about how the experiences and outcomes might be organised and planned for in *creative* ways which encourage deep, sustained learning and which meet the needs of their children and young people. (Scottish Executive 2008: 20, my emphasis)

There are further references to encouraging pupils and allowing curriculum developers in schools to be creative and innovative (pp. 14, 36, 39).

This paper has two main aims. The first aim is to suggest that even when the notions of creativity and freedom are taken at face value, the alignment between CfE and Scotland's professional standards for teachers needs to be re-examined. I will do this by briefly referring to the Standards for Initial Teacher Education in Scotland. Second, I suggest a way in which the notions of freedom and creativity may be understood beyond their common sense meaning, to maximise the potential and promise of CfE. I will argue that such an understanding ought to draw on the philosophy underpinning Steiner-Waldorf (SW) education, where the

notions of creativity and freedom have long been established as ideals. I will do this by examining in some depth the conceptualisations of freedom and creativity as formulated by Steiner, on the grounds that these notions have for some time been operational in the SW education sector (it has been approximately 90 years since the inception of the first SW school). This will be done against a background of some of the research on creativity in 'mainstream' education. From this discussion will emerge why such a pivotal role is given in SW education to the development of intuition and imagination, in both teachers and pupils. Finally, I will conclude by suggesting how within the concrete limitations of curriculum, time and resources, it may be possible for teachers to develop their imagination and intuition to become more creative and free, to the benefit both of their pupils and their own continuing personal and professional development.

CREATIVITY AND FREEDOM IN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

It is significant to note that while CfE was heralded as a small revolution in the development of the school curriculum in Scotland, the Standard for Initial Teacher Education (Scottish Executive 2006b; which replaced the ITE Benchmark document, QAA 2000) has not been reviewed yet in response to the new CfE. In fact, the last review of the Standards was completed at around the same time as operationalisation of CfE commenced, as if to say that the national curriculum is independent from ITE. This might for example be the case if it were thought that the former focuses on content, whereas the latter is primarily occupied with process. In this light it is not surprising that the word 'freedom' does not occur in the Standards, and the word 'creativity' has only one mentioning, indicating teachers must:

Acquire the knowledge and understanding to fulfil their responsibilities in respect of cross-curricular themes including citizenship, creativity, enterprising attitudes, literacy and numeracy; personal, social and health education; and ICT, as appropriate to the sector and stage of education. (QAA 2007: 7).

Clearly 'creativity' here refers merely to one of many 'cross-curricular themes', or dimensions of content, of curriculum, rather than of teacher attributes impacting on process. Nevertheless, the fairly radical overhaul manifested in CfE clearly crosses any such simplistic boundaries between curriculum and ITE, between content and process, by promising more freedom for teachers to be creative, thereby lifting creativity to an essential attribute of teachers. Nor was any evidence found on the General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCS) website for how the requirements of teachers in the CfE might be enabled through another review of the Standards. The GTCS website does state that some changes were made to the Standards for Initial and Full Registration and the Guidelines For Initial Teacher Education Programmes in Scotland (GTCS no date). However, only one reference to CfE was identified in those Guidelines:

Programmes must address current educational issues and develop in student teachers the flexibility to play a positive part in new educational developments, such as A Curriculum for Excellence, by encouraging a disposition for professional enquiry. (Scottish Executive 2006b).

In other words, in this document CfE is conceptualised as only one of a range of possible educational innovations and teacher education programmes merely need to ensure that new teachers have the flexibility to deal with such developments, through 'encouraging a disposition for professional enquiry'. The assumption seems to be that the current regulatory documents are encompassing enough to not require any adjustments in the light of what was (initially at least) nevertheless portrayed as a major curricular innovation. It seems quite reasonable to imply that freedom and creativity may be fostered through professional enquiry, so that new teachers engage with the notions of creativity and freedom in a way that actively fosters their 'freedom to exercise their professional judgement' (Scottish Executive 2004: 5). It is however curious that the requirement for fostering such qualities in teachers is left implicit, rather than embedded explicitly within the Standard.

Thus, it seems that at the level of professional frameworks, little thought has yet gone into how new teachers might be educated themselves to realise the aims of CfE, leaving significant scope for teachers and teacher educators to give meaning to its aspirations. As suggested above, it could be argued that the values and competencies set out in the new Standard focus on lifelong learning and CPD and therefore do not require any special adaptation in the light of a new curriculum. Alternatively, a sceptic might justifiably argue that perhaps the new CfE is not after all the revolution it purported to be initially, but rather more like a repositioning of the 5-14 Guidelines with the notions of creativity and freedom injected for currency, but with very little real scope for their expansion. In this case it would be unrealistic to expect any real change in teachers' freedom to be creative. Alignment between CfE and ITE standards then becomes irrelevant to practice.

Alternatively, while it is necessary and legitimate to deconstruct the rhetoric of CfE, one could subversively employ its own rhetoric and explore instead the implications of CfE by taking seriously the aspirations of freedom and creativity, and by exploring these notions more fully, offering a perspective that may allow teachers and teacher educators an opportunity to capitalise on CfE beyond its likely (superficial) intentions, and thereby possibly regain a level of autonomy despite the prescriptive frameworks in which they now work. In the following section I will attempt this by exploring how creativity and freedom were conceptualised by Rudolf Steiner (1863-1925) and subsequently operationalised through Steiner-Waldorf education. The purpose is to engage 'mainstream' practitioners and teacher educators with a body of knowledge that they may find valuable in developing their thoughts about freedom and creativity, beyond the seemingly somewhat instrumental intentions of CfE.

CREATIVITY AND FREEDOM IN 'MAINSTREAM' AND STEINER-WALDORF EDUCATION

There is no doubt that a significant role has been cast for creativity on the stage of global progress, but for decades scholars have tried to define what creativity is and have studied it in an attempt to capture the processes underlying it, to harness its essence and thereby the ability to foster it systematically in order to reap its productive outcomes. The debates on creativity have not yet been

resolved. For example, Hallman (1963) pulled together the then available research on creativity, drawing on wide-ranging research on personality, the creative process, psychological systems, types of thinking and personal reports. He proposed five 'necessary and sufficient' criteria for creativity, namely connectedness, originality, non-rationality, self-actualisation and openness, which, when all present, 'must of necessity' result in creativity (p. 29). Hallman's review is particularly interesting for its broad vision and the inclusion in his criteria of 'non-rationality'. However, the focus of more recent research has been mainly on the more tangible aspects of creativity, in particular creative thinking and creative output (Eysenck 1996; Craft 2003).

Within the research on creativity in education there are studies concerned with fostering creativity through arts education, such as music, visual arts and drama (for example Poole 1980; Lindstrom 2006) besides those essentially concerned with education for creative thinking across the disciplines (Craft 2003). As an example of the former, as part of CfE, there is a reappraisal of the role of the Arts, with subjects such as drawing, painting and music being seen as relevant to the development of cognitive skills across the curriculum (e.g. McNaughton, Mitchell & Eaton 2003; LTS 2008b). Indeed, the research examining arts education generally argues that the arts have a vital contribution to make to the education of young people (Mason & Gearon 2006) and should therefore be taught as much as other subjects, such as maths and English. Arts education, it is argued, indirectly encourages creative thinking which may then be transferred to other contexts.

Research examining creative thinking, on the other hand, seeks to understand the cognitive and contextual factors required to enhance creativity directly and generically, independent of subject or discipline. It argues that teaching creative thinking more or less directly will result in greater creative abilities across the entire curriculum and life as a whole. This mirrors similar arguments in the thinking skills area, where there has been an ongoing debate about the existence of generic thinking skills and whether they should be taught through other subjects or on their own (Andrews 1990; Higgins & Baumfield 1998; Johnson & Gardner 1999; Craft 2006).

It is interesting to note that research on creativity has largely lost sight of the role of Hallman's criterion of non-rationality as well as Torrance's (1962) perceived need for fostering the imagination and has instead focused almost exclusively on contextualised cognitive models and their outcome. This is not surprising given the emphasis on global competitiveness, accountability and transparency. Something that cannot easily be captured through measurement and then enhanced through educational interventions is often thought to be too subjective to be considered part of a scientific approach to education. It is safe to assume that the notion of creativity as used in CfE at most refers to the common sense meaning of 'innovation', that is 'doing something new', implementing change, or engaging with the arts, and the same could be said for much of the research on creativity. CfE then simply wants teachers to do a little bit more experimentation, try something new, probably in response to top-down initiatives and definitely within clearly defined quality structures and lines of accountability. Not much room it seems therefore for so-called 'non-rational' approaches. However, some alternative perspectives on creativity in education are beginning to emerge in the

mainstream literature. These once again include an element of 'non-rationality', such as values (through wisdom; Craft 2006) and intuition (through 'thinking at the edge'; Claxton 2006), at least recognising that there is more to creativity than creative thinking and that the non-rational and affective domains need to be included as well.

However, predating much of the debate on creativity is the development of education. Given the strong emphasis in this sector on creative activities, development of the imagination and, for teachers, an understanding of the philosophy underpinning its practice, as well as its significant expansion across the world, it is surprising that creativity research has taken little notice of this sector. The SW curriculum offers creative activity infused across all its subjects, and explicitly aims to develop young people's imagination through it (Oberski 2005, 2006). For Steiner, imagination and freedom are closely connected and creativity serves moral development, rather than global competitiveness. While thinking is still the lynchpin in Steiner's view, the thinking he had in mind included the non-rational and affective domains ('heart thinking'), rather than merely the intellect. In order to understand what he had in mind, it is necessary to engage in some detail with his Philosophy of Freedom (PoF; Steiner, 1999). Steiner's phenomenological approach is identical to, but a further development of the method developed by Goethe (and indicated by Schiller; see Steiner 1968) in his research on, for example, plants and colour phenomena and which was described as a 'phenomenology of nature' by Bortoft (1996). Goethean science has been used with interesting results across a range of disciplines. I will here briefly sketch Steiner's (1968) argument, insofar as it is relevant to the current discussion. One vital quality of Steiner's philosophising is that it is experiential, that he never reasons beyond what can actually be experienced by the reader, with more or less ease. In the same vein, and consistent with Goethe, he also strongly argues that we must look to the actual world around us and within us to come to an understanding and knowledge of it and ourselves and not get carried away with abstractions:

It is clear that all human actions are not alike in the degree of freedom with which they are carried out. A baby crying for milk is clearly not free, whereas a politician in complex negotiations does have a degree of freedom. What determines this distinction is the extent to which the person in question knows why they are doing what they are doing. In other words, it is the thinking that precedes and accompanies the action which determines whether or not it can be considered free and we should clearly distinguish between those actions for which the subject knows why he/she is doing them and those for which this is not the case. So before we can really understand what freedom is, we need first to understand what thinking is. But we can only really understand thinking by investigating our own thinking. While we can study other people's reports of their thinking, or the results of sophisticated scientific experiments on thinking, other people's thinking can never be experienced directly and therefore cannot be fully known. This is not the case for our own thinking, which after all we produce ourselves. In principle, we have the possibility at least of know this thinking completely

In fact, Steiner goes further and maintains of thinking that: (1) under normal circumstances, 'it is the unobserved element in our ordinary mental and spiritual

life', it is transparent and it is not possible to observe my current thinking, only my past thinking, but because thinking is part of our own activity, we can know it 'more immediately and more intimately than any other process in the world.' (p. 27); and (2) when we make thinking the object of observation 'we are not compelled to do so with the help of something qualitatively different, but can remain within the same element' (p. 31). Thus,

in thinking we have got hold of one corner of the whole world process which requires our presence if anything is to happen. The very reason why things confront me in such a puzzling way is just that I play no part in their production. They are simply given to me, whereas in the case of thinking I know how it is done. (p. 32).

In other words, unlike everything else that we can observe, thinking is the one thing in the world that we can know most clearly, because we are solely responsible for its course (no thinking can be observed if I don't actually do any thinking). And because thinking precedes any distinctions we make and any knowledge we have, Steiner concludes that it would be incorrect to call it subjective or objective as it precedes also the very distinction between subject and object. Therefore, the thinking arising in us when we observe an object is as much part of the object as are its physical characteristics and the object becomes visible to us in its full reality only when observation and thinking are combined. I observe a tree and immediately a concept 'tree' is added to it by our thinking:

I know, moreover, that something happens in me while I am observing the tree. When the tree disappears from my field of vision, something remains in my consciousness – a picture of the tree. This picture has become associated with my self during my observation. My self has become enriched; its content has absorbed a new element. (p. 49)

It is this new element that remains in us after the object has disappeared from our field of vision that Steiner calls 'mental picture', of the tree in this case. It is the mental picture which is important in relation to the imagination, as discussed below.

In the second part of the book Steiner explores the consequences of this worldview for the whole of life, returning to the notion of freedom and coining the terms 'moral imagination' and 'moral technique'. It is here that the importance of imagination and intuition for fostering freedom becomes fully evident. When my actions are based only on concepts connected with percepts ('percepts' are the contents of our observations, before thinking is joined to them) that I have at some time or place encountered, I am acting on the basis of my personal mental pictures, which are connected to those percepts and are therefore subjective, dependent on my prior experiences, my past position in space and time. If, on the other hand, I base my actions on pure intuitions, unconnected as yet with any existing percepts, I then first have to translate those intuitions into actions. This I do by using my imagination to create mental pictures. Now to link this back to the idea of freedom, if I act on the basis of existing mental pictures, I am not free. If, on the other hand, I base my actions on pure intuitions, translated into mental pictures for action through moral imagination and then into those actions through moral technique, am I truly free (p. 128). Thus, Steiner distinguishes four levels of individual life in relation to degrees of freedom: (1) perceiving through the senses,

where a perception is immediately linked to an action; (2) feelings, such as pride, honour, pity and so forth, which are associated with particular percepts; (3) thinking and forming mental pictures, where particular thoughts and mental pictures accompany percepts and lead to actions; (4) and conceptual thinking independent of percepts, that is pure intuition.

Steiner's philosophy of freedom, also called ethical individualism, shows how freedom and creativity (in the sense of basing action on pure intuitions by using moral imagination and moral technique) can be understood as intimately interwoven in terms of human development and potential. Through engagement in creative activities, participants develop their imagination. And presumably the more these creative activities are intertwined with the natural world, the more effective the development of intuition, moral imagination and moral technique is. In children and young people this development happens unconsciously. However, in adults this becomes a fully conscious process through the addition of specific exercises focusing on observation and intuition (see for example Colquhoun & Ewald 1996, Steiner 1974, 1989) in relation to the natural world. Of course it should be borne in mind that there are other perspectives on freedom and creativity which might reach quite different insights into the relationship between them.

DISCUSSION: A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND FREEDOM

Steiner's philosophy of freedom seems to suggest that the development of intuitive thinking and imagination together form the basis of an inner freedom, which could help teachers to capitalise on the opportunities afforded by CfE. Goethe developed a method for the development of this kind of thinking, by first developing 'exact sensory imagination' (Bortoft 1996, Colquhoun & Ewald 1996, Seamon & Zajonc 1998, Barnes 2000, Steiner 2000, Bywater 2005, Wahl 2005) which help to develop the imagination in harmony with the natural world. Steiner developed this further by describing numerous exercises for training in intuitive thought (e.g. Steiner 1974, 1989) as a preliminary to moral imagination and technique.

Furthermore, this perspective on freedom and creativity includes Hallman's criteria and goes well beyond purely cognitivist explanations, but lends force to the argument that the arts have a vital role to play across the entire curriculum. So for example, Hallman's criteria of connectedness, non-rationality, self-actualisation and openness are certainly addressed through Steiner's approach, and his criterion of originality would also certainly apply as by definition moral imagination and technique would result in new percepts.

Nielsen (2003, 2006) identified drama, exploration, story, routine, arts, discussion and empathy as key aspects to engaging pupils through the imagination in SW schools. Clearly to be able to work with their pupils' imagination, teachers themselves need to have strongly developed imaginative faculties. ITE programmes for the SW sector therefore aim to equip their students with these strategies, for application across all curriculum subjects, through active use of and participation in such activities by both student teachers and teacher educators themselves (see for example University of Plymouth; Woods, Ashley & Woods 2005).

In addition, in-depth engagement with the Goethean method and with Steiner's writings and exercises aims to increase self-knowledge to the greatest possible depth. Rather than these strategies being merely used to transmit knowledge, the reverse is true in that curriculum content ('knowledge') provides the opportunity for employing these strategies, with the aim of developing intuition and imagination. This equally applies to the Goethe/Steiner methods of inner development; it is the process, at least as much as the content which fosters the development of freedom (cf. Scharmer 2007). Thus, in order for teachers to develop their freedom in this deeper sense, they would need to develop their intuition and imagination. We therefore need a 'curriculum for excellence' not just for schools, but for ITE programmes as well, which makes time and space for creative activities and exercises for the development of inner freedom, both of student teachers and teacher educators.

CONCLUSION: FREEDOM, AUTONOMY & CREATIVITY

The aim of SW education is to lay the foundation in young people for the development of intuitive thinking. CfE rightly suggests that teachers themselves need to embody its four main aims. Thus, teachers, like pupils, need to be given opportunities themselves to develop inner freedom through intuitive thinking and as such the teacher is on a journey of learning often longer and more challenging than his/her pupils (at that point in time). In other words, what the teacher aims to build as a foundation in the pupils without their awareness is at the same time needing to unfolding itself consciously within the teacher him or herself. Thus freedom in SW education, as applied to teachers, refers to an inner freedom, which needs to be worked on and developed in order to enable the development of the foundations for such freedom in young people. In this way, Steiner's philosophy of freedom can shed light not only on the development of creativity and freedom in pupils, but on how, through the development of teachers' own creativity and freedom, this could be achieved. Freedom, seen from a SW perspective, is much more than just having the space, time and resources to be creative and innovative. It implies having the *inner* freedom, moral imagination and technique to work creatively within any constraints. This, no doubt, is an ideal, but one worth striving for.

Teachers' freedom or autonomy has for many years been a highly debated topic in the research literature, for example in relation to the development of statements of competency in Standards for ITE. Since Steiner's days, there has been a decrease in teachers' professional autonomy internationally, an increase in state intervention and a development of educational science, based on methods derived from the natural sciences. As described succinctly in Scotland's Standards for Full Registration for teachers, the benchmark document for Initial Teacher Education 'specifies the range of *attributes* expected of newly qualified teachers in Scotland.' (GTCS 2006: 3, my emphasis). While the notion of freedom employed in the policy documents relating to CfE could be interpreted as simply increasing autonomy of teachers, CfE comes with new pressures on teachers to become more creative, but maintains a high level of scrutiny of their work and of the achievement of their pupils. I have elsewhere already addressed the relevance of a perspective based on Steiner/Goethe to initial teacher education in

general (Oberski & McNally 2007) in relation to statements of competency and this argument will not be repeated here.

While it would be a simple matter to critique the Standards on the basis of their minimal references to creativity, innovation, autonomy or freedom, the intention here was to look for a way in which it might become possible for teachers to grasp positively the opportunities offered by CfE within the existing structures and frameworks, by exploring a sector of education in which creativity and freedom are already highly valued. Without exploring the possible meanings of freedom and creativity, CfE is very likely to result merely in a tokenistic evidencing of creative teaching. Instead, what is needed is an in-depth understanding of what freedom and creativity could be, as I have attempted above, in order to turn these concepts to serve, rather than rule teachers.

I have argued that freedom and autonomy are both prerequisites for creativity, but at the same time that these qualities are developed through the imagination and therefore through intense engagement with creative processes, such as the strategies described by Nielsen. While the introduction of such strategies in ITE programmes itself would certainly foster development of the imagination, it is in combination with the in-depth study and application of the Goethe/Steiner epistemology itself that imagination and inner freedom could develop, but a discussion of the Goethean/Steinerian methods themselves falls outside the scope of this article. There is scope within current programmes of ITE to introduce some of those strategies and exercises across topics and thereby help students not only to meet the requirements of the Standards, but to develop a faculty of imagination which could provide the basis for their ability to be free and creative, within the well-defined frameworks provided by central government.

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