



technology, children, schools and families

# **Affect: knowledge, communication, creativity and emotion**

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## **Introduction**

Concerns about emotional well-being have recently become the focus of social policy, particularly in education settings. This is a sudden and unique development in placing new ideas about emotion and creativity and communication in curriculum content, pedagogy and assessment, but also in redefining fundamentally what it is to 'know'. Our report charts the creation of what we call an 'emotional epistemology' that may undermine all previous ideas about epistemology, draws out implications for educational aspirations and purposes and evaluates potential implications for these aspirations and purposes if trends we identify here continue into the future.

Emanating from diverse interest groups and aiming to achieve a very wide range of objectives, the idea that educational institutions must address affective, emotional and personal aspects of learning and subject content is changing the purposes, processes and content of education. Although there has been a long running interest on the part of psychologists and educationalists in the affective aspects of learning and education, the current shift to prioritising emotional aspects in pedagogical and curriculum content is distorting the balance between cognitive and affective. This not merely puts the emotional first but is undermining the cognitive. The subtle yet profound ways in which this is happening, and their effects on what policy makers and professionals now regard as the fundamental purposes of schooling, are obscured by the *ad hoc* introduction of diverse initiatives and the diverse concerns that drive them.

Political initiatives that address concerns about the 'emotional well-being' of children and young people have gained widespread support. Statutory demands placed on educational institutions and welfare services under the 'Every Child Matters' (ECM), policy framework, together with priorities identified in the Children and Young People's Plan, incorporate specialist interventions for children and young people diagnosed with, or presumed to have, emotional and behavioural problems, alongside generic interventions to develop all children's emotional well-being. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and its successor, the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCFS) has made emotional well-being and associated notions such as

emotional competence, self-esteem and emotional literacy key foci for myriad interventions encompassed by the strategy for Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) in schools and through other initiatives.

The BCH review's concern with current and future sources of knowledge makes it important to explore how advocacy of an emotional and affective turn in education is coming from the disciplines of psychology, counselling and therapy in higher education, mediated by a very large number of organisations outside higher education.

Apart from two critiques, by Carol Craig and ourselves, these developments have not been examined in detail and their underlying assumptions have not been questioned (Craig, 2007; Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008a, 2008b). This review for the BCH programme draws directly on our recent work. It:

1. outlines our methodology for identifying the rise of an emphasis on emotional well-being
2. summarises key trends that have led to increasing emphasis on the affective and emotional aspects of education in all sectors of the system
3. identifies the main influences on these trends, including academic disciplines, pressure groups and other influential bodies
4. explains the socio-political context in which these trends and influences have arisen, through what we and others have identified as a therapeutic culture
5. evaluates the current and potential future impact of these trends on knowledge, creativity and communication in educational contexts

**Keywords:** education, aspirations, communication, creativity, politics, curriculum, knowledge, education institutions

## Methodology

The authors of this review commissioned us to write this review based on arguments we developed in the book, where we identified an array of examples in policy texts, popular culture, everyday educational practices and the experiences of friends, family and colleagues that we argue demonstrate the rise of therapeutic approaches to the management of emotions amongst children, young people and adults. We argue from the basis of these examples that a fundamental shift is taking place in ideas about what education is for, and in ideas about what it means to be human from which the purposes of education at various points in history are derived. Drawing on Wittgenstein, we developed a methodology based on giving examples to shift people's perception of what was happening in schools, colleges, universities and workplaces. The power of examples is that they enable people to look and see for themselves by making them sensitive to similar instances in their personal experience. As Wittgenstein said, the solution to problems in the way we misunderstand the world was to follow the advice: 'don't think, but look!' (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p66).

We now aim to carry out systematic empirical work and further theoretical exploration, to test out the arguments and propositions we developed in the book. We recognise that the arguments are both original and controversial and we ask readers not to reject them outright, as some of our critics have done, but to consider what our arguments, and the numerous examples we have collected, indicate if they do not identify a therapeutic shift in education and its consequences for the future of education which we address in our book and take further in this review.

## A new emphasis on emotional well-being

### Diverse concerns

Former adviser in the British Prime Minister's policy unit, Geoff Mulligan, argued in February 2008 that the well-being of populations would come to be the main preoccupation for national governments, just as military prowess had been in the nineteenth century (*The Times*, 15 February 2008). This mirrors calls by international bodies such as UNICEF for official indicators of children's happiness and well-being, where children feel loved, safe and respected, to be the hallmark of civilised societies (2007). Other international bodies also present well-being as key to progressive and prosperous societies (OECD, 2001).

In the United Kingdom, support for policies to develop emotional well-being throughout the education system emanate from very diverse concerns. A core influence since 1997 has been the British government's particular conceptualisation of social justice, where social policy has connected emotional well-being to a view that social exclusion emerges from destructive influences that damage self-esteem and emotional well-being and is therefore a key characteristic of social injustice (see Blair, 1997; Furedi, 2004; O'Connor and Lewis, 1999). Policy makers attribute 'complex needs', including low self-esteem and feelings of vulnerability and risk, to a complex cycle of material, social and emotional deprivation that both creates and exacerbates marginalisation and exclusion (see SEU, 1999). Advocates of interventions and measures to develop well-being argue that emotional deprivation is as, or more, important than social and material deprivation and that the latter account for only 15% of people's sense of well-being (see Layard, 2007; Huppert, 2007).

In keeping with such arguments, the government argues that children with emotional problems will be prone to mental illness, marital breakdown, offending and anti-social behaviour, and that the scale of emotional deprivation and illiteracy may be so great that schools and other agencies can no longer leave children's emotional skills to parents (DfES, 2005; DCFS, 2008). These concerns resonate with those expressed by the World Bank, UNICEF and the OECD where well-being is presented as integral to equity and social justice and embedded in legislation for human rights, aid interventions and reconstruction programmes (UNICEF, 2007; OECD, 2001; Pupavac, 2001, 2003).

In Britain, a spate of widely-publicised reviews reveals concerns about the unhappiness and levels of emotional ill-health affecting children, young people and adults (see UNICEF, op cit; Alexander and Hargreaves, 2007, DCFS, 2008). In 2006, the book *Toxic Childhood* by child psychologist, Sue Palmer depicted children as over-stressed, over-tested, unhealthy, materialistic and under-nurtured emotionally and was promoted through a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* signed by 100 experts in the fields of education, neuroscience, psychology, care and social work. Such themes also appear in popular books on mental health and psychoanalysis (see, for example, L. James, 2007; O.James, 2007; Connelly-Stephenson, 2007).

A strong influence on government interest in emotional well-being is the work of economists Andrew Oswald and Richard Layard, and the pressure group Antidote who have helped create consensus amongst supporters of the New Labour government and some supporters of other political parties that the State should address the public's happiness, self-esteem and well-being as integral to healthy citizenship and economic prosperity (see Antidote, 2007; Layard, 2005; Oswald 2007). Defined by Antidote as "becoming aware of our inner experience, so as the better to understand other people and through them to experience a sense of connection to the wider community", emotional literacy enables people to

- Find ways to feel connected to each other and [to use] their relationships to deal with emotions that might otherwise cause them to lash out in rage or withdraw in despair
- Deal with the emotions that can render them unable to take in new information, access emotional states such as curiosity, resilience and joy that lead to a rich experience of learning
- Engage in activities that promote physical and emotional well-being and broaden the range of what they can talk about with each other in ways that make it less likely that they will abuse drugs and alcohol, bully their peers, or engage in other forms of self-destructive activity (Antidote, 2002, p2; see also Weare, 2004; DfES, 2005a; OfSTED, 2007).

An important recent shift has been to embed emotional literacy and self-esteem in the broader notion of emotional well-being and to depict schools as a key site for developing them, alongside de-stigmatising mental health problems for certain groups and dealing more effectively with the behaviour of others, such as disruptive boys who are seen to mask emotional vulnerability and poor emotional literacy (see Cowie et al, 2004; Spratt et al, 2007; Francis and Skelton, 2006).

In summary, our review of policy texts and texts from those advocating different interventions for emotional well-being in educational settings shows that such interventions have become prominent because diverse constituencies seek numerous goals and make strong claims for the various interventions they promote. Aims include:

- addressing the mental health problems of a minority of children and young people
- remedying assumed emotional deficiencies and emotional 'illiteracy' of families and particular groups singled out as emotionally vulnerable or lacking emotional well-being and therefore marginalised and excluded
- motivating people to learn and achieve more effectively
- making people feel good about themselves
- exploring the factors that affect children and young people's sense of self and identity in negative or debilitating ways and which affect motivation and capacity to learn and which are a prime cause of social inequality
- promoting a range of social, economic, occupational and personal benefits that are claimed to arise from better emotional literacy and/or emotional intelligence and/or emotional competence and/or emotional well-being
- engaging people with education by elevating emotional dimensions of their experience in a system widely seen to be arid, over-rational and test-driven for all children, or irrelevant and demotivating for those deemed to be disaffected.

### **Emotional interventions**

Emanating from these aims, we identify four types of intervention appearing in schools and colleges. First, specialist interventions for children and young people diagnosed with behavioural and emotional problems include 'nurture groups', group counselling for children with family and personal problems, psychological assessments of individual children and accompanying interventions such as circle of friends (see, for example, Boxhall, 2002; Bailey 2005, forthcoming).

Second, generic interventions through the SEAL include circle time, Philosophy for Children classes, peer and non-peer mentoring and buddy schemes, mediation and anti-bullying schemes, drama workshops for transition between sectors and stages, special assemblies and the harnessing of traditional and new subject areas (the latter include

personal, social and health education and citizenship) as vehicles for emotional well-being and emotional literacy (see Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008 for detailed analysis; also Claxton, 2002; www.jennymosely.com; SAPERE, 2005; DfES, 2005).

As part of this second category, while government and professional concerns about emotional deprivation and vulnerability remain, a new general intervention is emerging from a rapid shift from interventions to build self-esteem and address emotional problems to a more upbeat emphasis on interventions that develop and assess characteristics such as resilience, stoicism, optimism and 'being in the moment' (Huppert, 2007). This shift in tone and focus reflects the growing influence of academic expertise in positive psychology and neuro-science as a basis for government attention to well-being through specific activities to foster them, dubbed in the media as 'happiness' classes (see, for example, *Guardian*, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2008).

Third, there is growing use of support services such as counselling, the use of retention officers, learning managers and classroom assistants, disability support officers and mentoring schemes, as well as stress workshops for examinations and other initiatives such as the use of animals as 'emotional support' for university students diagnosed with depression. The government has proposed recently that all schools have a counsellor to identify those with 'low level' emotional disorders such as stress and anxiety and to prevent the emergence of these into more profound mental health problems.

The fourth type of intervention encourages broader curriculum and pedagogic changes within mainstream subject teaching in order to develop and assess dispositions, attitudes and characteristics that are believed to be essential for well-being, social equity and integral to an education relevant and fit for modern life. Such interventions include learning to learn and some strands of assessment for learning.

## **The rise of emotional and personal skills**

### **Learning to learn**

In parallel to interventions that address emotional problems or which aim to develop emotional literacy and emotional well-being overtly, other trends aim to broaden the role of educational institutions. There are growing concerns about the need for schools to pay attention to emotional needs and to 'personalise' students' experiences of, and feelings about, learning. Guy Claxton, one of the leading proponents of 'learning power' justifies an emotional turn in education:

It is not too fanciful to see, behind the youth culture of raves and drugs, sport and celebrity, the rise of teenage pregnancy and fundamentalism, *the shadow of insecurity: the feeling* of not being able to get a grip on the miasma of choices and opportunities ... No wonder so many young people clutch at the first kind of boy or girl, the first shallow ideology that comes along. It's not so much that young people live in poverty ... as they do not know where to turn for direction and value. In such a state, algebra and parts of speech can seem a little beside the point (Claxton, 2002, p48, our emphasis).

From this perspective, adults fail young people by not 'listening enough' to what they are telling them. Citing a survey of 3,500 11-25 year olds by the Industrial Society which reports young people as fearful of challenge and future opportunities and trends, Claxton argues:

Schools are seen as failing to equip young people with the ability to learn for life rather than for exams ... That last sentence is key. Remember this is the voice of

today's youth (not some sociological theory). They are telling us they are floundering, and that we are not teaching them how to swim. That's why they turn off from school ... they are not intrinsically lazy or bolshy or lacking ability: *they are disappointed* in our reactions to their predicament and flailing about (*ibid*, p48 our italics).

From this perspective, classroom strategies and assessments need to develop 'good learners', where: "being a good learner is not just a matter of learning a few techniques like mind mapping or brain gym. It is the whole person: their *attitudes, values, self-image and relationships* as well as their skills and strategies" (2002, p15, our emphasis). It is important to stress that although Claxton writes in terms of learning and motivation, at the heart of his concern is the idea that we are not giving due attention to pupils' feelings.

Other advocates of activities to develop dispositions and attitudes associated with emotional literacy, such as developing a positive self-concept, social skills and emotional sensitivity and empathy, also connect these goals with learning to learn. For example, Weare argues that traditional subjects can be vehicles for this through discussion: teachers setting up discussion of how the teacher and learners feel when learning and encouraging students to see how they learn 'emotional control' (through waiting their turn and being persistent through difficulties) and resilience by 'bouncing back' when learning goes badly (Weare, 2004). Recent promotion of these ideas uses the vocabulary of positive psychology: 'giving young people the means to be their own happiness creators and maintainers', where strategies for learning power encourage pleasure, joy, flow, optimism, curiosity, self-efficacy, engagement, resilience and stoicism, mindfulness, holistic approaches, and developing the means to flourish (Claxton, 2007; see also Huppert, 2007).

### **Assessing soft outcomes**

Interest in the personal, social and emotional outcomes of participating in education is integral to some interpretations of 'assessment for learning' as a vehicle for assessing crucial outcomes of education. A recent study explored desirable outcomes for pupils identified by a group of trainee teachers:

Empathy; self-awareness; social competence; resilience; creativity; reflectivity; the ability to self-evaluate/self-assess; enthusiasm for learning; being a good citizen; happiness; being caring; being respectful, tolerant good team players; applying knowledge; learning to learn; problem-solving; communication; self-management; making a positive social contribution (Hargreaves, 2007, p190).

Supporters of these goals advocate their development through subject knowledge. For example, the task of sharing meanings from a text students have read "[builds up] a rich picture of collaborative learning ... students take responsibility for knowing what needs to be known and for insuring (sic) that others know what needs to be known" (Hargreaves, 2007, p189). Designing formative and summative assessments to capture these outcomes improves students' abilities to retain subject-knowledge and to make more flexible use in its application, and, therefore, leads to better success than traditional learning (*ibid*). Integral to these processes and outcomes are notions such as '*allowing a learning voice*', '*learning about their own learning and being socially active and responsible*' (2007, p191). According to Hargreaves, 'for an assessment for learning [method] to be valid, its learning outcomes must be socially appropriate for learners of the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (2007, p185).

Such outcomes are broader than those encompassed by conventional assessments of attainment and methods to assess and record them were designed originally for

diagnostic and formative purposes based on self-report by learners (see Daugherty et al, 2007, 2008). Despite the significant difficulties this raises for valid and reliable assessment, soft outcomes are increasingly a focus for developing summative measures, including proposals to assess emotional well-being as part of a citizenship qualification at Key Stage 4 (see Layard, 2007).

### **Changing the curriculum subject**

The lines between learning to learn and associated notions of 'assessment for learning', and a view that the emotional outlook, attributes and skills associated with them are as, or more, important than subject content, is blurring rapidly. This challenges 'old' ideas about teaching and assessing subject knowledge:

'I am questioning whether a version of learning as acquisition and using information and skills still has the social currency it had before the information revolution in which information is readily available but wise application of it still depends on choices made by social beings' (Hargreaves, 2007, p191).

Advocates of emotional literacy as a central goal for schooling also focus on traditional subjects as vehicles for developing the attributes and dispositions assumed to comprise it:

- the arts (dance, painting, music, literature) through seeing, listening and taking part, expressing emotions through movement, sound and picture, rehearsing personal problem-solving, developing empathy by reading and hearing about others with the same experiences and understanding the causes of emotions
- English Language by developing 'an emotional vocabulary', developing a positive self-concept through talking and writing about the self, creating a sense of coherence through family history, increasing empathy by writing stories
- biology through understanding the physiology of emotion including own body reaction, understanding how the brain works and the centrality of emotion to how we think, learn and experience the world, emotion in animals and our 'common ancestry'
- history through understanding the cause of emotion through biography and the relative impact of individual versus social forces in shaping events, developing personal coherence through family and local history, understanding emotion in major events such as war, terrorism and atrocities and the role of positive emotion in humanitarianism such human rights and the abolition of slavery (Weare, 2004, p92).

In a recent keynote presentation to a European conference on assessment, Dylan Wiliam, an influential academic in the field of formative assessment, argued that pedagogy associated with developing skills and attitudes for learning to learn was 'curriculum and subject neutral'. From this perspective, assessment processes within subject domains, such as questioning and feedback, become vehicles for generic and affective outcomes that are both relevant to employability and to lifelong learning (Wiliam, 2008).

Some go further, and call for radical changes to traditional subjects. The latest review of the primary curriculum by academics at Cambridge University calls for a reduction in time spent on traditional subjects in order to develop personal and emotional aspects of children's lives. In secondary education, a book from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), appropriately titled *Subject to Change: New Thinking on the Curriculum*

sets out the proposition that 'Education is assumed to be primarily about the development of the mind', but ... this is a 'misunderstanding' (Johnson et al, 2007, pp69-70). A new skills curriculum is needed for all children, which will be relevant and different:

The major difference from previous curriculum models is that it should consider the needs of the whole person without assuming that the academic or intellectual aspects should have a higher status than the others. The first truly comprehensive curriculum should rebalance the academic, situated in the mind, against those parts of humanity situated in the body, the heart and the soul. Curricula may well be designed by people for whom the mind predominates, but those designers should see that the 21st century requires a population with higher levels of social, emotional and moral performance, and a regenerated capacity for doing and making (2007, p71).

The authors state 'We need a bit of honesty in this analysis. Most people are not intellectuals. Most people do not lead their lives predominantly in the abstract, It is not clear that it is preferable to do otherwise: the world cannot survive only through thought. (Johnson et al, 2007, p72). John White has a similarly sceptical view of the importance of subject disciplines and criticises the 'Victorian elitism' and irrelevance of old school subjects (2007; see also Hegarty, 2006).

In a more conciliatory vein, the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) responds to the demands of ECM by arguing that secondary school teachers will need to 'adjust' the way in which allegiance to their subject asserts their specialist expertise. Rejecting popular caricatures of teachers only interested in examinations and 'crowding heads with facts', they reassure teachers that subject study remains integral to education, and that 'subjects are educational resources of remarkable power, offering unlimited scope for realising an enormous range of educational purposes ...' (Kirk and Broadhead, 2007, p13).

Yet, after loading this 'enormous range' of purposes (which encompasses all the soft outcomes discussed above) into subjects, they continue:

under ECM, the educational purpose of learners will depend on how resourcefully teachers will be able to draw on their subject knowledge base, and how readily they will jettison the monocular professional vision that is associated with blinkered use of the subject ...' in order to develop an extended professionalism that removes 'old dichotomies' between ... 'teaching a subject and enabling pupils to learn how to learn, or even being a learning coordinator or consultant; between the cultivation of learners' achievements and fostering their well-being; and between personalisation and the promotion of high standards' (2007, pp14-15).

### **Accounting for soft outcomes**

Another important influence on the rise of affective and emotional aspects of education emerges from those who propose system-level monitoring of differences in how children and young people learn to deal with failure and the factors to which they attribute achievement or failure. In this vein, Tim Oates cites evidence from the *Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning* to argue that differences in psychological outlooks and attitudes and the behaviours they lead to in relation to educational effort, lead to differential acquisition of personal capital, thereby causing under-performance and social inequalities. He goes on to argue that while it is possible to assess the soft skills that comprise personal capital, this is not desirable. Instead, he advocates 'benchmarking' them through surveys at institutional level and possibly at national level as a way of

seeing whether educational approaches moderate the impact of social background (Oates, 2007).

Calls to assess soft outcomes or to bring them into accountability measures, together with wider calls to either harness subject knowledge for emotional purposes or to reduce it to fit in a more emotionally-based curriculum, relate to interventions for emotional well-being in three ways. First, the constructs that are claimed to underpin 'soft outcomes', together with the teaching and assessment processes that lead to them, are frequently elided, along with behaviours and dispositions, values and attributes that also appear in the long lists of so-called 'skills' associated with emotional well-being. Second, calls to change pedagogy and assessment, and concerns about the well-being of children and young people, both reflect the same disaffection about the content and purposes of schooling amongst growing numbers of academics, teachers and professional groups. Third, classroom activities and assessments of dispositions, attitudes and skills associated with learning to learn and soft outcomes respond to, and encourage, images of humans as emotional rather than rational subjects who need an appropriately affective curriculum.

### **Influences on the rise of affective, emotional and personal skills**

Policy and practice around emotional well-being have been fuelled by, and encourage, a rapid rise of activity to promote these developments and their underlying images of the human subject. As we pointed out above, these developments are not taking place in a coherent way, as part of a strategy to elevate the emotional and affective aspects of learning. Instead, they are *ad hoc*, emerging from different concerns about the state of childhood generally and children's well-being in particular, concerns about rising levels of disengagement and disaffection with schooling, and from adults' own concerns about the future and schools' abilities to prepare people for it. In these concerns, a target for scepticism is the relevance and usefulness of traditional subject disciplines.

This lack of coherence is exacerbated by the way in which developments outlined above are promoted by a large number of diverse organisations. Over 70 are involved in promoting various initiatives for well-being, learning to learn, emotional literacy, etc. These include university departments and research centres in positive psychology and well-being, children's charities and campaigning organisations, local authority psychologists, private therapists and psychologists. They are creating a flourishing industry of courses and consultancies in interventions for emotional well-being. Unlike other commercial ventures in education, such as 'products' associated with learning styles or thinking skills, the beneficiaries of emotional well-being and associated notions such as emotional literacy and self-esteem are enjoying unprecedented influence and government-sponsorship.

The important observation for this review is that the knowledge base for the rise of affective and emotional aspects of learning is extremely diverse, and incoherent in aims and claims, and that these are dominated by different branches of psychology, counselling and therapy. Its very incoherence enables disparate initiatives to be promoted and funded by government.

### **The socio-economic content of a therapeutic culture**

Although it is important to understand the sources and aims of developments, their effects in the form of growing calls to dismantle or reshape subject knowledge and content cannot be divorced from wider socio-political and philosophical shifts in ideas about the human subject. It is here that the most profound changes are going on, and these have hitherto been unexplored in educational analysis.

Whilst all the interventions summarised above come from diverse sources and concerns, they all draw, in varying degrees of coherence and expertise, on an eclectic range of principles and practices derived from different branches of counselling, therapy, cognitive and educational psychology and positive psychology. In our book, we analysed how the underlying psychological base of interventions, and the claims that accompany them, resonate powerfully with, but also draw upon, populist therapeutic ideas about the emotional effects of life on ourselves and others. These are reflected in, and promoted through, the ever-expanding genre of self help books and 'tragic life stories', lifestyle and health magazines, television and books, and texts to help people diagnose and deal with emotional and mental problems. We argued in our book that therapeutic assumptions and explanations have become part of an everyday cultural mindset about the emotional self and its problems and have been taken up through government policy.

From this perspective, interventions for emotional well-being are the latest turn in a 'therapeutic ethos' which has emerged over forty years throughout Anglo-American culture and politics and increasingly influences the public's constructions of the self and others (see Rieff, 1966, 1987; Lasch, 1979, 1971; Nolan, 1998; Furedi, 2003). We also argued in our book that the British institutionalisation of a therapeutic ethos through educational policy and practice is unprecedented.

An obvious feature is the exponential extension of counselling, psychoanalysis and psychology into more areas of social and personal life, policy and professional practice. In education, parenting classes and the SureStart and Connexions personal advice strategies blur boundaries between teaching, welfare and applications of therapy, while interventions summarised above are rooted in counselling and therapeutic techniques and assumptions (see, for example, Turner 2007; Watts 2001). Yet, the significance of a therapeutic ethos is much more far-reaching than this: it also offers a new sensibility, a cultural vocabulary, explanations and underlying assumptions about appropriate feelings and responses to events, and a set of associated practices through which people make sense of themselves and others (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008).

This therapeutic mindset is evident in largely unchallenged assumptions that are translated into interventions. These include:

- children's feelings about the world, life and learning are 'baggage' that get in the way of learning subjects
- it is important to deal with these feelings before 'learning can take place'
- feelings of 'not being listened to' are barriers to acceptance of adult and teacher authority
- more and more children have emotional problems that must be dealt with by eliciting and processing them, preferably with others, either through specialist interventions, or through generic interventions like circle time.

These assumptions might be couched in terms of 'paying attention to the whole child', 'bringing pupil voice into educational processes and organisation' or 'bringing the affective dimensions of learning into the classroom' but they are informed, we argue, by an underlying therapeutic ethos.

Curriculum initiatives and policy statements that have pointed teachers and educationalists towards a concern with emotional well-being may have begun as *ad hoc* responses to societal or cultural changes but they now have a theory behind them. In a therapy culture, initiatives undertaken for a variety of educational reasons often take a therapeutic form. We are tempted to make the claim that such initiatives *must* take a therapeutic form except that it is possible to resist a dominant culture; nevertheless, the first premise in developing any form of resistance must be an awareness of what has changed.

Many critics of our arguments point to the positive personal or educational aspects of interventions. They also claim that these address psychological or affective aspects of learning, or that they foster 'personal outcomes' or 'personal capital' and are not 'therapeutic'. Yet, our critics miss the point that not only are the claimed value and successes of these interventions only established through a circular logic, but also that their emergence from a therapy culture strengthens the turn towards the emotional, towards feeling and away from the intellectual. We have defined the therapeutic turn in education as the emphasising of the emotional, of feelings, over the intellectual.

This broad but useful pointer is meant to contextualise all interventions for emotional well-being, including recent ones arising from 'positive psychology', as interventions that arise from, and reinforce, therapy culture. The circularity in the defence of positive psychology and other interventions for emotional well-being is that they are based upon assumptions about a generalised psychological need in society that needs therapeutic responses. Therapy culture both produces that need, since no one can escape its assumptions, and, in turn, therapeutic interventions of a crude popular sort as well as skilled psychological interventions become welcomed, desired and lead to successful outcomes within that culture.

The shift to a therapy culture, according to Rieff, marks a 'sharp and probably irreparable break in the continuity of Western culture' (1966, 1987, p261). We have traced the development and full flowering of therapy culture in the present time elsewhere (Ecclestone and Hayes 2008). We argued in our earlier analysis that this full flowering is distinctive in that it not only pervades education but education is the main site for reinforcing it. This strengthens therapy culture not merely because it makes it ubiquitous but because it embodies a misanthropic theory of human beings (see also Furedi, 2003).

## **Promoting a theory of the diminished subject**

One of the most difficult and controversial aspects of our analysis to both convey and convince listeners or readers of its validity is our argument that, however well-meaning and however much couched in the language of 'empowerment' and 'learner voice', a view of humans as 'diminished' lies behind the emotional turn in education. Of course, this is never directly articulated at policy levels or by educational thinkers. Indeed, such a theory is difficult to express directly in relation to children and subjects taught in schools.

Instead, we argue that this theory is mediated through the variety of pedagogical initiatives we describe in this paper. Although these seem similar in form to many initiatives in personal development or affective education from the past, they differ in their content. This is also why many critics of our thesis think that nothing has changed, and that current interventions such as learning to learn, assessment for learning and activities to teach the attributes of emotional literacy and well-being are merely the latest manifestation of a progressive focus on the affective aspects of life and learning.

Our attempt to convince them is based on a need to look at the explicit theorising of the diminished human being that does exist at the level of philosophy and which articulates what we see as an attack on human subjectivity in its proper sense. By its 'proper sense', we mean that the human subject is not merely in the past but also in essence, an active agent who seeks to control and change the world. Malik makes this clear in his essay on *What is it to be human?*:

'For the past 500 years, scientists and philosophers have taken it for granted that human beings are exceptional creatures, not simply distinct from other animals but superior to them because of our possession of reason and consciousness, language and morality' (Malik, 2001, p13)

This was the philosophy of humanism, a desire to place rationally autonomous human beings at the centre of philosophical debate, to glorify human abilities and to view human reason as a tool through which to understand nature; a conviction that humankind can achieve freedom, both from the constraints of nature and the tyranny of Man, through the agency of its own efforts ...' (*ibid.*). Education systems that aim to develop the full potential of rationality and autonomy have been a goal for western societies since the Enlightenment.

Yet, the idea of the human subject as an active agent of change has been under sustained and increasing attack for the last five decades. An extensive treatment is given in Heartfield's *The 'Death of the Subject' Explained* (2002) and we draw on this for our overall analysis. We cannot detail this attack here but it is worth noting that it comes during this period of 50 years from the Western philosophical left and then more powerfully and crudely from the political right. Here, we provide just three brief examples, two from the 'left' and one from the 'right'.

Marx criticised the bourgeois human subject as being constrained by capitalism but the French Marxist thinker, Louis Althusser, considered that Marx rejected entirely the individual human subject whether an economic, historical, ethical or philosophical 'Subject' and that he 'replaced the old couples individual/human essence' as factors in history with the impersonal new 'concepts (forces of production, relations of production, etc)' (Althusser, 1969 p229). In this way, Althusser removes human agency as a bourgeois phenomenon.

Feminist thinkers also see the subject not as bourgeois and replaceable by the impersonal, but as being the subject of oppression so that '[t]he identity of the feminist subject ought not to be the foundation of feminist politics' (Butler, 1990, pp5-6). Yet this claim makes it impossible for women to act since they are said to have a bourgeois and oppressed identity so cannot act from that degraded position. So what can women do? Heartfield comments that 'What began as a criticism of the monopoly over freedom exercised by men has turned, paradoxically, into a criticism of freedom as such (2002, p43).

Both these accounts criticise the 'Subject' as an active agent. The evolution of such views means that we cannot assume that a left wing view will necessarily be based on the idea of promoting an active human agency under repressive capitalism.

Yet, while an attack on human agency has come from the political and philosophical left, it is most explicit on the right. In the writings of philosopher John Gray, it reaches new levels (Gray, 2002, 2003, 2004). For him, humans are just one among many animals. In *Straw Dogs: Thought on Humans and Other Animals*, Gray tries to 'present a view of things in which humans are not central' (2002, p.x); that our 'core belief in progress is a superstition' (2002, p.xi) and to undermine the assumption that we have the power to remake the world' (2002, p.xiv). Humanity as the collective subject is done away with ...

*'"Humanity" does not exist. There are only humans, driven by conflicting illusions and subject to every kind of infirmity of will and judgement' (2002, p12).*

From this perspective, even Islamic terrorists are motivated by the illusion that their actions are a prelude to a new world. For Gray, the problem is science which *'By enlarging human power ... has generated the illusion that humanity can take charge of its destiny'* (2003: 119). Humanity comes off badly when compared to animals because *'Other animals do not need a purpose in life'* (2002, p199). Through his popular misanthropic polemics, Gray aims to reverse the perspective that Malik says has been the basis of humanism for 500 years. His ideas are the nearest to a theory of the diminished human subject at the present time.

Educational thinkers also draw on philosophy to question whether the purpose of education should, or can be, to develop rational human autonomy and ask whether humanism as an attempt to define the essence of what it means to be human is possible, or even a desirable aim. A view that what it means to be human should be an 'open question' and that education should be a process of bringing each person 'into being' is based on arguments that rationality cannot and should not be a measure of humanity, not least because it excludes those who cannot achieve whatever standards of rationality pertain at any given time (see Biesta, 2006).

Whether as individuals, groups, or as the whole of humanity, ideas from the philosophical and political left and right question not only the notion of an active human subject but also whether education can or should aim to foster it. We intend in other work to look at how these arguments change the purposes and processes of education in more detail (see also Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008, chapter 8). However, from what we have outlined here, it is possible to argue that the attack on the human subject is taken up in advocacy of emotional and affective aspects of education as a dual attack on children and young people as potential rational agents in the world, and on what they learn.

## **Current and potential future impact of these trends on knowledge, creativity and communication in educational contexts**

### **The dual attack on the subject**

It is important to reiterate that proponents of an affective and emotional turn in education never present their view of children in this diminished way. Yet, a dual attack on the subject, as the universal pursuit of a body of knowledge and as a human being, is, nevertheless, we argue, behind their advocacy of new interventions. There has been no serious debate about the developments we have outlined: indeed, there is active and widespread support for the dismantling of subjects in primary schools and their use in secondary schools for an array of attitudes, dispositions and attributes (presented as 'personal and learning skills'). The Rose Review of primary education, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's promotion of personal, learning and thinking skills, and the ATL's calls to dismantle subjects have not, so far, received any public challenge.

Lack of challenges to these developments change public, political and professional ideas of what comprises 'knowledge', 'creativity' and 'communication' across the education system. Supporters of the affective and emotional turn in education regard personal knowledge, creative pedagogies and assessments that elicit and develop it and communication that changes the relationship between teachers and students into a much more personal and emotional one as 'progressive'.

Yet, these claims are not the only aspects of knowledge, creativity and communication that need critical examination. The therapeutic culture that we have outlined here, drawing on a body of work from sociology and political studies, engenders a much deeper change in what we regard as knowledge, reflected in a dual attack on the 'subject'. This, as we have argued, is an attack on the human subject and also an attack on humans' ability, either in wanting to understand or in being able to be educated in order to understand the world as rational, autonomous beings. It is a simultaneous and symbiotic attack on the knower and the known. In education, the attack on knowledge, on the curriculum subject, has preceded the attack on the human subject. This means that what is to be known requires changes in the knower in terms of dispositions, attitudes and behaviour.

It is this new attack on children and young people as 'knowers' that we address in the balance of our critique, and in our evaluation of its implications for knowledge and creativity in education.

We have argued that changing ideas about both the place and purpose of subject knowledge in schools and ideas about the human subject are, simultaneously, reflected in, and reinforced by, a therapeutic ethos. This ethos embodies populist orthodoxies rooted in psychoanalysis and psychology about the emotional self and therapeutic explanations for dealing with it, thereby reflecting and reinforcing images of human beings as 'diminished'. Preoccupation with emotional well-being in education inserts a cultural perspective that 'regards most forms of human experience as the source of emotional distress ... [where people] characteristically suffer from "an emotional deficit and possess a permanent consciousness of vulnerability' (Furedi, 2004, pp110/414). From this perspective, a diminished self finds exposure to uncertainty and adversity, including disappointment, despair and conflict simultaneously threatening to 'the integrity of the self' and inhibiting of it (see also Nolan, 1998; Pupavac, 2001, 2003).

We argue that, whatever the good and well-meaning intentions of proponents, this diminished human subject now dominates thinking about schooling, curriculum content, teaching activities and assessment. We have emphasised throughout this review that calls to change the subject do not promote this diminished view overtly but we argue that behind such calls are either images of children and young people as needing more and more emotional support to learn at all, or as being so instrumental that they will only learn what is personally and emotionally relevant to them. Either way, the emotional self becomes the subject of education because children are no longer seen as able to cope with traditional forms of subject knowledge that have, until now, been seen as the main purpose of education.

## **Eroding humanist education**

In the context of developments explored in this paper, the renaming of the Department of Education and Skills as the Department for Children, Families and Schools is extremely significant. It removes 'education' as a social and political aspiration in the remit of government's organisation for the first time since 1863, and replaces humanist aspirations with humanitarian interventions based on perceived transgressions to children's rights.

Taken together, we argue that these concerns and the interventions they lead to are redefining fundamentally what it means to educate the 'whole person', and through this, they redefine the subject. Humanist goals of learning a body of worthwhile and inspiring knowledge as a route into understanding the human subject and recognising its potential for agency in the world, learning to love particular subjects, or aspiring to excel in them, are increasingly regarded as dubious goals. Even UCET's apparent support for subjects turns knowledge into an instrumental vehicle for soft outcomes.

When aligned with the idea that personal capital is integral to social justice, humanitarian perspectives that place well-being at the heart of human rights cast 'old-fashioned' humanist education not merely as irrelevant, elitist and demotivating but as socially unjust.

## **Profiting from the emotional turn**

Beneficiaries of the therapeutic turn in education tap into guilt that schools and adults do not listen enough to young people's anxieties and are not dealing with their feelings of being worried and scared. They also reinforce beliefs that stressed-out and anxious young people cannot cope with, and do not want, a traditional subject-based curriculum. Instead, there is a growing orthodoxy that they want a more personally relevant and 'engaging' education where adults and their peers listen to them and affirm them. This view erodes subject disciplines and encourages a curriculum which assumes that topics and processes can only be engaging if they relate to the self.

## **The creation of an emotional epistemology**

Finally, we argue that the interventions, and their implications for education, summarised in this report and exemplified in our book, are an outcome of the emergence of what we call an 'emotional epistemology'. This reflects an un-philosophical distortion by educationalists of the search for a foundation for knowledge in epistemology. The most famous example of the search for foundations or grounds for our beliefs and our being is Descartes' 'I think, therefore I am' (*cogito ergo sum*).

Although numerous philosophers including Heidegger, Dewey, Foucault and Habermas have questioned this foundation for humanism, we see a new, and for us, dangerous tendency towards another sort of grounding of beliefs and our being in 'I feel, therefore I am' (*sentio ergo sum*). We do not go here into epistemological matters, such as Russell's famous critique of the cogito, that all that can be claimed is that 'There are thoughts' with no ontological implications. In parallel, the claim that 'There are feelings' tells us nothing about the self although it seems to say something important about the self in a therapeutic culture.

We see the need for more philosophical work to be done on the analysis of the turn towards emotions and for clear distinctions to be made between things often called 'emotions', such as feelings, sensations, moods, inclinations and motives, in relation to the therapeutic educational literature (Ecclestone and Hayes, forthcoming). This is because we fear that the unphilosophical assumption behind the therapeutic turn is to stress the primacy of unanalysed and perhaps unanalysable feelings in analogy with bodily sensations or 'feelings'.

Emotional epistemology seems to be the celebration of the authenticity and authority of feelings as somehow increasingly determinant of the self. We hope to undertake more work on the nature of this determination and, in particular, the developing frameworks for the assessment of the emotions of children and young people and for the likely rise of evaluation and accountability measures of these (see, for example, OfSTED, 2008).

## **Future trends**

It is too soon to tell whether the rise of therapeutic interventions and a political, public and professional preoccupation with emotional features and outcomes of educational experiences will be more than a passing fad. Indeed, the sheer number of initiatives

introduced in different parts of the education system by the Labour government might suggest that emotional well-being might be replaced by something else. Yet, if we are right that the dismantling of subjects in favour of an ever-widening array of dispositions and attributes is part of an emotional turn in education, and if we are right that this is, in turn, part of a more profound philosophical and cultural crisis of confidence in humanism, then the emotional turn is going to be more enduring than a fad.

For the next few years, we predict that, whatever government is in power, concerns about the poor state of people's emotional well-being are too deeply embedded in popular culture, psychology and politics to go away quickly or at all.

This suggests some practical implications for educational institutions and curriculum developers. First, the *ad hoc* nature of developments and the range of concerns that drive them could erode subject disciplines in unintended ways because of the lack of an overview of how they are changing. Second, as children progress through compulsory schooling into further and higher education, too much emphasis on their emotional well-being could undermine their motivation and ability to respond to the cognitive demands of subject learning. Third, they could simply become bored with attention to their emotional needs through education and find education disengaging and demotivating. Finally, if our arguments about the underlying diminished images of the human subject are valid, there are more profound implications for what teachers, the public and policy makers regard as the purposes of education which undermine a humanist belief in its transforming potential.

## Conclusion

Educational activities have always produced personal and social outcomes as the by-products of cognitive or practical ones, and education institutions and their teachers have, to a greater or lesser extent, taken account of emotional and affective aspects of their students' lives and learning. Yet, contemporary disillusionment with a traditional subject-based curriculum and traditional assessment, together with an intensifying belief that children and young people are both disaffected and distressed by humanist education, are creating a hollowed-out subject curriculum into which a plethora of instrumental personal and social attributes, values and dispositions can be inserted. In the name of humanitarian rights, the search for "true sources of satisfaction" will become more popular as the core value of schooling, where the overarching question is "are the children happy?" (Layard, 2007).

Attacks on the human subject as too diminished to learn, and on the curriculum subject as irrelevant, elitist, unjust and inimical to well-being, currently enjoy the sponsorship of the British government. Commercial and political interests in developments we have explored here make critical debate about the impact of emotional well-being on the subject harder but more necessary than ever.

In conclusion, our analysis shows that what policy makers, professionals and parents regard as valid knowledge is being changed fundamentally and perhaps irrevocably by the affective and emotional turn in education. A secondary school history teacher said to us "you know that something has changed when children want to know more about themselves than about the world". Yet, his lament, like our critique, is increasingly a minority view. An epistemology of emotion is replacing old forms of knowledge, rooted in profound pessimism that children are either able or motivated to know the world. This, in turn, changes pedagogy and assessment and casts new approaches to pedagogy and teachers' and students' communication as 'creative' and 'progressive'.

At the very least, this review should be used to create a public and political debate about our analysis: we find an increasing number of teachers and parents agree with the

examples we have marshalled to illustrate our arguments and further empirical work and debate will reveal further implications of the translation of an emotional and affective turn in education for knowledge and pedagogy and assessment (see Ecclestone et al, 2008b; Ecclestone et al, 2008b; Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008b; Ecclestone and Hayes, forthcoming).

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