Making Sense of the Successful Learner

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Introduction

While ‘the learner’ is a term that has become familiar over the last few years in Scottish education, its origins lie in the discourse of developmentalism that emerged after the Second World War. Prior to 2004 the common term for referring to children in school was ‘pupil’, a word that has been studiously avoided in favour of ‘learner’ in the series of documents that support the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in Scotland. This change in nomenclature signifies a major alteration in the relations between children and young people, their teachers and the curriculum. However, the nature of these new relations is far from clear cut given the disparate meanings that have become associated with ‘the learner’ over time. This chapter begins by exploring the history of ‘the learner’ as a concept. Tracing the movement of the term across different contexts the chapter highlights how different discourses concerning education and change have coalesced to create ‘the learner’ as a compendium term encompassing disparate strands of meaning. In particular, it focuses on three characteristics of ‘the successful learner’: first, as someone with an agentive and autonomous orientation to the world; second, as someone committed to self-improvement; and third, as someone who has mastered the skills of personal learning so that they can respond flexibly to the demands of a changing environment. The second part of the chapter examines how ‘the learner’ has been interpreted in the course of six years of policy making in Scotland. This section analyses a suite of documents issued by central government agencies between 2004 and 2010. These texts were intended to help teachers implement CfE, a new curriculum based on a broadly constructivist and experiential approach to learning, for the education of children and young people from 3-18 years of age. The examination reveals some of the tensions and discontinuities that the move from pupil to learner can entail. The concluding section considers the implications of the case for the realization of initial aspirations expressed in the notion of ‘the successful learner’ and the problems of making these meaningful in the context of schools.

The Origins and Evolution of the Learner

The evolution of the notion of the learner is complicated since, from a set of common origins, there were two distinct lines of development which later coalesced in the current discourse on life long learning. One of these lines of development was the influence of developmentalism within the education system, particularly in adult education. This strand was generally perceived by those involved in its translation into classrooms as educationally progressive.
The second line of development, where developmentalism was conceptualised as a means of achieving learning in organisational settings, had a major influence in business and commerce. This strand is associated with the rather more oppressive techniques of performance management and quality assurance. Initially, the discourse that gave birth to the learner derived from a belief that social affairs could, in response to research in the human sciences, be better and more humanely managed than they had been in the past (Lewin, 1948). Later, there was increasing disquiet at the ease with which the organisational learning discourse, shorn of its moral purpose, could be used to control and manipulate economic and social life (Rose, 1999).

**Theories of cognitive development**

In the decades following the second world war, there were a number of educational debates centring around constructivist ideas of learning. These ideas derived from the work of psychologists investigating change and development in children and adults. The publication, in the 1950s and 1960s, of Piaget’s investigations appeared to lend empirical support to a pragmatist approach to education. In the United States this led to a revival of interest in enquiry, activity and reflection on experience as essential elements of learning (Dewey, 1973). After the successful launch of Sputnik in 1957, the resultant fear that Western democracies were being outstripped by the technological advances of state socialism highlighted the shortcomings of education and the need for reform became a priority. In this context, educationalists in the USA (Bruner 1977) and the UK (Stenhouse 1975) proposed fundamental changes to the curriculum and pedagogy in schools, based upon constructivist principles. At the same time the works of Russian developmental psychologists, in particular Vygotsky’s research into the socio-cultural mediation of learning in young children, were published in the West (Vygotsky 1961, 1978). He identified the central role of language and social interaction in the cognitive development of the child as the means whereby concepts were abstracted from phenomena. These ideas were compatible with the earlier work of Mead in the USA, who proposed that the development of identity and social structures was dependent on social interaction (Mead, 1934; Berger and Luckman, 1967). The result was a renewed focus on processes of knowledge use and creation. Constructivism/social constructivism was seen as a way for children and young people to master abstract concepts and habits of thinking, which would allow them to be flexible and creative in a world where change and innovation were constant features of social life. The means of achieving these outcomes was to switch to an educational process centred on the child, and her interaction with both the material world and the ideas and thoughts of others (Bruner, 1977).

A critique of conventional schooling also came from another branch of psychology concerned with the learning of people with mental and emotional problems. Carl Rogers, a leading practitioner of humanistic counselling therapy, published *Freedom to Learn* in response to what he described as a profound educational crisis. He wrote:
… we cannot rest on the answers provided in the past but must put our trust in the processes by which new problems are met. (1969, p.303)

A way must be found to develop a climate in the system in which the focus is not upon teaching, but upon the facilitation of self-directed learning. - - - Only thus can we develop the creative individual who is open to all of his experience; aware of it, and accepting it, and continually in the process of changing. (Ibid, p.304)

These terms are almost exactly replicated in the current discourse on the need for lifelong learning (OECD, 2004). What a humanistic focus brought to the proposals for reform was a concentration on the need for the development of the 'whole person', or 'self', of every child. This was seen as part of an inward-looking reflection on experience, which developed self-awareness, confidence and resilience. The emphasis on a person's capacity for self-direction was in part derived from Maslow's work on motivation (1943) which posited self-actualisation as a fundamental human drive towards autonomy and agency. Concentration on the active participation of persons in self-direction also resonated with the pragmatists' concern that education should foster young people's ability to participate in a democracy. While humanistic psychology placed an emphasis on self-development it also brought to the table a number of group and one-to-one pedagogic strategies for achieving 'personal growth' which could be adapted for use in educational settings (Jacques, 2004; Brandes and Ginnis, 1986).

While these ideas generated relatively large scale curricular projects in the secondary sector (Bruner 1977, Stenhouse, 1968), they achieved little long lasting influence on the curriculum. Child-centred approaches fared rather better in primary schools, for example, through the implementation of the recommendations for curriculum reform made in the Plowden Report (HMSO, 1967) in the United Kingdom. Even so, their hold was relatively tenuous. 'Progressive' ideas about self-directed and active learning were largely rejected with the introduction of the National Curriculum (HMSO, 1988), which reverted to a more transmissive approach to developing children's knowledge. There were, however, further revivals of constructivist teaching approaches in secondary education in the 1980s, for example, as 'student-centred learning' under the banner of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (Yeomans, 1996). This time the association between constructivism and schooling was about developing alternative curricula that would motivate underachieving pupils. It was not so closely linked to accelerating cognitive development as it had been in the 1960s and 1970s although the development of generic thinking and study skills was supported by TVEI. The therapeutic version of developmentalism retained an influence in the maintenance of systems for pastoral care, pupil guidance and behavioural management. Child-centred approaches became associated with remediation, useful responses to underachievers who had proved 'unable' to benefit from the rigours of an academic curriculum.

However, constructivist reconceptualisations of learning became more firmly embedded in adult and further education. At much the same time as Rogers
(1969) levelled his critique at schools in America, Jessup, in a paper entitled *The idea of lifelong learning*, asked why the British education system was so out of date:

> Each man must learn for himself; it is an individual, internal experience, and no one else can do his learning for him. However, at least in recent years, the didactic aspect of education and the role of the educator have been emphasized more than the learning aspect and the role of the educand. (1967, p.15)

He went on to say that teaching methods in school should be based on participation and discovery, giving young people “an appetite to continue learning” since “schools create an aversion for learning that lasts a lifetime” (ibid). In 1973, Knowles published *The Adult Learner*, in which he made a contrast between education, as an imposition by teachers aimed at controlling the development of the individual and learning, as the growth, development and fulfillment of capacities under the control and direction of the learner. He promoted what he called andragogy as an ethical approach to personal growth, whereby learning activities were planned and evaluated by the learner. He contrasted this to pedagogy where planning and assessment were exclusively the domain of the teacher (Knowles, 1984). Influenced by the work of Freire (2001), his use of the term ‘learner’ signalled emancipation from the oppressive dogma of formal ‘schooling’ signified by the use of the terms ‘pupil’ and ‘student’. Andragogy also stood for the right to learn what was of practical relevance to the person at the centre of the education process. Thus, it also ran counter to the class-bound classification of subjects and the hierarchical relation of theory to practice typified by ‘traditional’ schooling. This ‘anti-academicism’ remains as an underlying thread of meaning associated with ‘the learner’.

Political elements in the definition of the learner continued to be influential especially in those movements opposed to the marginalisation and oppression of particular groups. For example, within the feminist movement, the use of education as the means of raising women’s consciousness of their own oppression gave them ‘voice’ to counteract the powers ranged against them (hooks, 1994). At the same time, the practice of ‘andragogy’ critiqued the basis of formal education and challenged institutional control of what constituted legitimate knowledge and who had the right to define it. Some of these ideas about the status of ‘the learner’ were eventually given a measure of endorsement for children and young people under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). In the United Kingdom, this led to a movement to promote the development of ‘pupil voice’ (McIntyre et al., 2005) in schools. This was both a recognition of children as full human beings with a right to participate in decision making and, more prosaically, as members of the school community with useful things to say about their educational experiences.
**Social psychology and action learning**

The second line of development for constructivist/pragmatic approaches to learning also originated in the post-war era. Kurt Lewin’s ideas about the means of changing social action (particularly in relation to racial conflict and prejudice) through the use of a new form of practitioner inquiry were extremely influential in the field of organisational development and management (Lewin, 1948). He proposed an approach to practitioner learning that he called ‘action research’ as the way to improving social practice. He claimed that change had to come through the collective involvement of those engaged in social action, because attempts at changing individuals outside their social context were ineffective. This was because ‘reformed’ individuals quickly succumbed to the pressure from others to return to the previous status quo. Action research, which is therefore fundamentally collaborative, is based upon a spiral of learning cycles consisting of three activities: first, planning; second, taking an action to carry the group towards its agreed objective and; third, fact finding to evaluate the effect of this action and provide the chance for participants to learn from it. The learning resulting from the completion of the first cycle is then fed into the next phase of planning, making a decision about the next action step and so on. Lewin argued that the complexity of social action required that practitioners should be directly involved in the research. This was because any improvement in practice had to be tailored to the situation in which activity took place, if it was to prove viable. In effect, action research was firmly based on a constructivist argument. This set of ideas about the social dynamics of learning were popularised in a series of influential texts on organisational learning (Argyris and Schon, 1974; Senge, 1990; Schein, 1992). In adult education settings, the legacy was Kolb’s (1984) conceptualisation of experiential learning which underpinned approaches to work-based learning developed in the 1980s and ‘90s (Boud and Solomon, 2001).

Lewin’s other major contribution to learning theory was his exploration of the effects of levels of aspiration. He found that setting goals for achievement that were either too high or too low decreased the motivation to learn and that the most successful students set goals which were just beyond their current capability. This was elaborated in the years that followed as goal theory (Locke and Latham, 1990) which provided the rationale for the development of performance management. Performance management uses a stripped down process of action learning in one-to-one interviews between a worker and her supervisor based on target setting and review. This technique, the appraisal interview, has been widely adopted, often tied to financial incentives, as a means of improving employees’ motivation and capability in both private sector and, more recently, public sector organisations (Armstrong and Baron 1998). Performance management is seen as embedding ownership (responsibility) with the employee who internalises the obligation ‘to learn how to learn’ to become more effective and efficient. The learner in this context masters the skills of ‘self-management’ and ‘self-direction’ towards the goals of the organisation.
To summarise, the notion of ‘the learner’ is broadly underpinned by constructivist learning theories formulated by psychologists in the 1940s and 1950s, and adopted by educationalists and policy makers in the 1960s and 1970s in a pragmatist/constructivist amalgam expressed as ‘student-centred learning’. These ideas found a relatively secure home in adult and continuing education, in part because they gave a justification for the rejection of traditional transmissive teaching approaches that were the bane of those whom schooling had failed. They were also adopted and adapted by those interested in organisational development and the improvement of commercial outcomes. Having become entrenched in adult education and associated with the use of work-based learning and performance management strategies, these ideas have returned full circle through the discourse of ‘lifelong learning’ (Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development [OECD] 1996, 2004) to their origins in child development and their application to schooling.

From these two trajectories, three dominant characteristics of the successful learner emerge:

- as someone who does rather than as someone who is done unto, the learner is an active agent who becomes increasingly autonomous as she learns;
- as a person who is continuously motivated by the goal of ‘self-actualisation’ in a reflective and inventive process of continuous self-improvement; and
- as someone who can use and apply the skills of learning how to learn in a variety of contexts and respond flexibly to the requirement for change.

There is no clear endpoint embedded in these characteristics for being a ‘successful learner’ in terms of knowledge and understanding rather, being ‘successful’ consists in the acquisition and maintenance of certain dispositions and competences and their associated procedural tools.

More equivocally, there is also the theme of collaboration and social interaction as necessary for cognitive development, for inventing and establishing new practice and as the basis of critical political action. The tension between this collectivist interpretation of learning and the more individualised interpretation of learning favoured by classic views of pupils and students tends to have been resolved in the latter’s favour. Collectivism is tamed by its conversion to community and shared vision.

**Bridging the gaps**

There are three more recent developments which have a bearing on the notion of the learner in Scotland. Arguably, these have all had an effect in reconciling the two major variants of the developmental discourse discussed above. The first of these is the penetration of quality assurance and performance management techniques; the second is the initiative Assessment
for Learning; and the third is the promulgation of the idea of ‘personalisation’ in the delivery of public services.

Since the introduction, twenty years ago, of the Quality Initiative in Scottish Schools (Reeves, 2008), the use of target setting, school and departmental development planning and the publication of outcomes, inspection reports and reviews have become entrenched within the education service. While the performance management of teachers has proved remarkably difficult to implement, this has not been the case in relation to pupils. Spurred on by the need to publish good results and corresponding improvements in data storage and retrieval, schools are increasingly engaged in tracking individual pupil performance. These developments offer both an improved capacity for diagnosis, targeted at the learning needs of individual pupils, as well as increased surveillance and control of children and young people. Through target setting and review during interviews with guidance staff and others, the techniques of performance management are an increasingly salient element in the work of schools. However, exactly who benefits from these practices is often unclear (Priestley, Robinson and Biesta, 2012).

Assessment for Learning was popularised by the publication of Black and Willaim’s pamphlet inside the Black Box in 1998. This promoted constructivist teaching techniques that centred on pupils and teachers receiving frequent and timely feedback on learning where the purpose of pupils’ learning activities was explicit and understood. Such formative feedback maximised the achievement of desirable learning outcomes through improving the accuracy of teaching responses and their relevance to pupils’ learning needs. Formative assessment, through the constant adjustment of the interactions between pupils, teachers and the curriculum in the context of learning and teaching, was key to the success of the most effective teachers (Wiliam, 2007). One of the key techniques was for pupils to work collaboratively as peer assessors as well as engaging in self-assessment.

Black and Wiliam argued that the variability in pupils’ attainment at classroom level was four times that of the variability of pupils’ overall attainment at school level and that these differences were due to teacher quality. From their review of the research evidence, it followed that if a teacher were to consistently apply Assessment for Learning techniques in class she would add 8 months extra learning per annum to her pupils’ attainment. This thesis had an obvious appeal to policy makers. Labelling constructivist practices, such as questioning techniques, ‘assessment’ tapped into politicians’ obsession with performance. Assessment for Learning subsequently influenced policies for school improvement throughout the UK. In Scotland it formed part of the Assessment is for Learning programme, widely seen as a precursor to the Curriculum for Excellence, and it is cited as providing the pedagogical basis for its implementation.

The concept of ‘personalisation’ in the delivery of public services championed originally by New Labour is the final development I want to consider. Leadbeater produced a pamphlet for the think tank Demos entitled Personalisation through Participation. He argued that ‘personalisation’, where
those using public services engaged with professionals to co-produce services tailored to their needs, was the way forward in the provision of public goods by the state.

More personalised solutions, in which the user takes responsibility for providing part of the service, should enable society to create better collective solutions with a less coercive, intrusive state, a lower tax burden, a more responsible and engaged citizenry and a stronger capacity within civil society to find and design solutions to problems without state intervention. (Leadbeater, 2004 p.88, my emphasis)

Leadbeater claimed that personalisation, applied to education, would provide children with a greater repertoire of scripts for their education. The basic curriculum would be a common script for all but this could branch out in many ways and lead to different destinations. While Personalisation through Participation made great claims to be about fostering democracy and enabling service users to gain some control over how services are provided, Hartley (2007) makes the point that there was little in this document to indicate any real change in power relations. Indeed, Leadbeater's description of personalised learning takes us straight back to the performance management cycle so central to managerialist practice:

...learners should be actively, continually engaged in setting their own targets, devising their own learning plans and goals, choosing from a range of different ways to learn. (Ibid, p.71)

As Ranson observed (2008), pursuing a constructivist logic implies that pupils are released from the straitjacket of subject boundaries and given greater freedom to explore connections between fields. However, it also shifts the focus from measurable knowledge to ‘monitoring the attributes and character of students as they engage in the learning process’ (p.215). Personalisation seems to entail that this monitoring becomes the ‘do-it-yourself’ obligation on the person benefiting from state provision. Applied to children and young people, it places responsibility for learning with the learner, not simply as a matter of motivation or moral obligation but as a direct and continual engagement in a new form of managerial-clerical work. On the more positive side “their own” choice of targets, plans and learning experiences might pave the way to greater autonomy.

Localising the discourse – how Scottish policymakers made sense of ‘the learner’ 2004-2010.

This section tracks how the concept of the learner has been developed in the series of documents, published by the Scottish government, to support the implementation of CfE between 2004 and 2011. The analysis that follows is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows how the original elements that framed the idea of ‘the successful learner’ in 2004, shown with bold lines in the centre of the diagram, developed over time to achieve a rather different balance and emphasis at the end of the period. The abbreviations used in the diagram are the same as those outlined in the text.
The policy thread begins in 1996 with the publication by the OECD of *Lifelong Learning for All* which marks the transition of the term ‘lifelong learning’ from its reference to adult education to its application to ‘all learning endeavours over the lifespan’ (OECD, 2004). What is important to note here is that the term ‘learner’ travels, as an integral part of the lifelong learning discourse and the meanings attached to it in non-compulsory adult education, into schools and other educational settings. The 2004 OECD briefing on lifelong learning emphasises that its contemporary significance is systemic – it refers to learning across all sectors of education and in both formal and informal settings. Its other key features are:

- The centrality of the learner with the concentration on meeting learner needs rather than on the learner complying with what educational institutions are prepared to offer;
- Motivation to learn which results from paying attention to developing individuals’ capacity to manage their own learning described as “self-paced and self-directed learning’;
- The need to accommodate the multiple objectives of education policy as the purposes of education are both diverse and changeable. (2004 p.2)

The document *A Curriculum for Excellence* contains the eight page report that framed the implementation of a new curriculum for 3-18 year olds in Scotland. In it successful learners are defined as persons with:

- enthusiasm and motivation for learning,
- determination to reach high standards of achievement;
- openness to new thinking and ideas.

They are able to:

- use literacy, communication and numeracy skills,
- use technology for learning,
- think creatively and independently,
- learn independently and as part of a group,
- make reasoned evaluations, and
- link and apply different kinds of learning in new situations.

(Scottish Executive, 2004 p.12)

This description of the learner placed an emphasis on skills and performance, although the document made several references to the need to establish ‘a strong foundation of knowledge and understanding’ (Ibid, p.11). The list of seven curricular principles at the end of the document fleshed out the nature of the learner a little further. Four of these were much the same as the
principles that underpinned the subject-based curriculum that preceded CfE (SOEID, 1998). Three others – Challenge and Enjoyment, Depth and Personalisation and Choice – were significantly different and indicated the basis on which this new curriculum was construed. Under the heading Challenge and Enjoyment, learning was described as active and derived from experience. Children and young people would be able to make judicious choices about their learning, according to their needs and aptitudes, in a context where the purpose of their learning activities was clear to them. In other words, the underlying theoretical position was firmly constructivist. The text went on to state that the acquisition of intellectual skills occurred through the experience of interaction with the world, which provided the challenge and motivation to learn. Under the heading Depth, the skills of problem-solving in complex interdisciplinary contexts provided a gateway to advanced levels of understanding. This invoked Bruner’s spiral, process-based curriculum in which generic intellectual skills (for example, those of analysis) are progressively developed over the course of schooling. There was no mention of collaborative or cooperative learning other than the phrase “as part of a group” (listed above). Under the heading Personalisation and Choice, the text points to the role of ‘support’ in maintaining the learner’s motivation and engagement. This support should be provided through assessment which had to be explicitly linked to the purposes of learning. The principle of Personalisation and Choice meant that:

The curriculum should respond to individual needs and support particular aptitudes and talents. It should give each young person increasing opportunities for exercising responsible personal choice as they move through their school career. Once they have achieved suitable levels of attainment across a wide range of areas of learning the choice should become as open as possible. There should be safeguards to ensure that choices are soundly based and lead to successful outcomes. (Ibid p.14).

Over the next six years there followed the publication of A Curriculum for Excellence: Progress and Proposals (Scottish Executive, 2006) and a suite of five documents entitled Building the Curriculum (BC 1-5) which offered advice to teachers on the implementation of CfE. While A Curriculum for Excellence used the word ‘pupil’ sparingly, all the other documents refer exclusively to ‘learners’ or ‘children and young people’.

Progress and Proposals (Scottish Executive 2006) (P&P) was the first document published after the text of A Curriculum for Excellence had received ministerial approval. It was largely concerned with the structures of implementation. There were four items of particular interest:

a. It expressed a desire on the part of the government’s Curriculum Review Programme Board to consult with schools as to whether it would be desirable and possible for choices in relation to
subjects to take place over a more extended period during the early years of secondary schooling (page 15).

b. It endorsed Assessment is for Learning as critical to the implementation of the new curriculum. On page 17 it reiterated Black and William’s tenet that it is the interaction between pupils and teacher and the latter’s responsiveness to what the pupils understand and can do that is crucial to ensuring learning activities are effectively directed to meet learning needs.

c. On page 13, there was a framework of experiences and outcomes to be achieved by most children and young people at 6 levels from 3-18 years of age.

d. It stated that the new curriculum was largely about 'how to teach', implying that the issue of what to teach had already been resolved.

The first document in the BC series, The Contribution of Curriculum Areas (BC1) laid out the content of the curriculum (Scottish Executive, 2006). The eight areas of experience were largely the same as those for the 5-14 curriculum – with health and wellbeing replacing personal and social education. Literacy and numeracy were included as cross-cutting themes for which all teaching staff were responsible, and the document emphasised the importance of interdisciplinary studies and projects. The sections on each of the curricular areas listed their particular contribution to successful learning and placed an emphasis on cognition and problem-solving with a clear subordination of 'knowledge' to 'skill'. BC1 affirmed that the statements of experiences and outcomes would describe, 'the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes' (2006 p.3) that pupils should develop.

The next document in the series had the title Active Learning in the Early Years (BC2) (Scottish Executive, 2007). The active learning of children in nursery and primary school settings is described as ‘learning by doing, thinking, exploring through quality interaction’. The document goes on to say active learning involves ‘intervention and relationships founded on their (children’s) interests and abilities across a variety of contexts’, which result in ‘an independent and cooperative learner’. There is a criticism of teaching in the ‘passive’ mode (Carnell and Lodge, 2003), implied by citing the use of an overly didactic approach in the early years of primary education. A new association between active learning and cooperation is created in which the former is described as "the use and development of skills in context" and the latter as, "Sharing, planning and contributing towards joint efforts" (Ibid p.12). Cooperation seems to be understood more as an end in itself rather than as cognitively valuable – i.e. social constructivism is not clearly part of the mix. A claim that children have a natural disposition 'to wonder, to be curious, to pose questions, to experiment, to suggest, to invent and to explain' (Ibid p.13) underpins the principle of Challenge and Enjoyment. However, given that active learning is identified as an essential element of the whole curriculum, it is strange that both the title and the content of this text is confined in its application to younger children. Despite the extensive documentation produced by the policymakers, there is no explicit explanation of what active
learning might mean for older pupils and their teachers (Drew and Mackie 2011). This is strange omission, given that the new curriculum was supposedly largely concerned with changes in pedagogy. A reference to Assessment for Learning provided the only specific pedagogic guidance for active learning in the secondary sector.

The third publication, A Framework for Learning and Teaching (BC3) (Scottish Government, 2008), described children’s educational entitlement to: a broad general education followed by a senior phase with qualifications; the acquisition of skills for learning, life and work including the core skills of literacy, numeracy and health and well-being; personal support; and a move to a positive destination after school. In relation to personal support, this document stated:

> From the outset, young children are partners in the learning process, actively participating in the planning, shaping and directing of their own learning. With sensitive adult support, they will learn how to make good, informed choices and take responsibility for their own learning. (2008 p.29)

There was a certain tension here since the personal support to which pupils were entitled was to be provided by adults other than classroom or subject teachers such as guidance or pupil support teachers or members of partnership organisations. There was a reassurance that personalisation and choice ‘will continue to include choices in approaches to learning within the classroom’ (Ibid p.17). This confinement of support to a mentor figure, outside the context of the classroom, could divert attention from improving the quality of interaction between teachers, pupils and the curriculum that Black and Wiliam (1998) identified as an essential element of effective teaching and learning.

BC3 included health and wellbeing as a cross-cutting theme for the first time. This was significant, as health and wellbeing became the chosen vehicle for supporting and assessing pupils’ learning-to-learn skills and their commitment to self-development. It was also the site for widening the scope and range of what that self-formation would entail.

Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work (BC4) (Scottish Government, 2009), began with a 'Key Messages' page which emphasised that there were core, permeating cross-curricular skills which all teachers were responsible for developing. Progression in the acquisition of these skills was fixed through the specification of learning experiences and outcomes at four different levels. In this, the Scottish policymakers followed the example of Department for Education and Skills in England (DfES 2007) who ‘wilfully misinterpreted’ (Gardner et al., 2008 p.91) the research underpinning Assessment for Learning by converting the recommendation for formative assessment into a summative schema of dubious empirical or theoretical worth. Of particular interest was the emergence of an ever more detailed description of what was meant by a ‘successful learner’ under the heading of “personal and learning skills”. These are listed as personal learning planning,
leadership, and thinking skills (in the form of a simplified Bloom’s Taxonomy), amounting to a mixture of self-management skills and generic cognitive skills. Personal learning planning was detailed further as the ability to:

- Identify, discuss and reflect on their own evidence of learning
- Use appropriate language for self-evaluation
- Take responsibility for managing their own learning
- Help to plan their own next steps in learning and set their own learning goals
- Make informed choices and decisions about their future learning. (Ibid p.13)

This looks rather similar to the expectations placed on employees in the implementation of performance management schemes. ‘Leadership’, in this context, seems to equate to the administration of self-management techniques. These particular skills attract an even more detailed definition in the next document in the series: *A Framework for Assessment* (BC5) (Scottish Government, 2010).

Learners do well when engaging fully in their learning, collaborating in planning and shaping and reviewing their progress. Approaches to assessment that enable learners to say, ‘I can show that I can - -’ will fully involve them. At all stages, learners should understand that assessment will support them in their learning and help them develop ambition to learn in increasing breadth and depth.

Children and young people can develop their confidence through thinking about and reflecting on their own learning. They should have regular time to talk about their work and to identify and reflect on the evidence of their progress and next steps, including through personal learning planning. Through frequent and regular conversations with informed adults, they are able to identify and understand the progress they are making across all aspects of their learning and achievements.

For this process of reflection to be effective, learners need to be supported in developing their skills in self and peer assessment and in recognising and evaluating evidence of their own learning. Peer assessment and other collaborative learning enables learners to support and extend each others’ learning, for example by being aware of what is expected of them from looking at examples and devising and sharing success criteria. As they develop skills in self and peer assessment, learners will build confidence and take more ownership for managing their own learning. By focusing on the processes of learning as well as the achievement of outcomes, they will become reflective and positive contributors to assessment.

Using these approaches to encouraging dialogue about learning, children and young people and staff can identify next steps and
learning goals based on feedback and evidence of learning. Children and young people should agree learning goals and should record them in ways that are meaningful and relevant, for example in diaries, learning logs and progress files. (Ibid p.19)

This marks a substantial re-definition of what it is to be a (pupil) learner in terms of work and activity. There is little indication of where choice comes into the matter as all statements of experiences and outcomes must be assessed. Additionally, their phrasing, 'I can do (make, plan etc.) x', makes it very clear who is responsible for recording and taking 'ownership' of these judgments.

Figure 1 The development of “learning how to learn” in the CfE documents 2004-2010.

The abbreviations are those used in the main text, under the heading Localising the Discourse.

The final document in the series originally had no title, it was simply referred to as ‘a file’, and consisted of a collection of all the statements of experiences and outcomes (Es&Os) for the cross cutting themes and the eight areas of experience. Each curricular theme or area begins with a section headed Principles and Practice, and both these and the statements that follow, organised as lines of development, vary quite markedly in nature and focus. Overall the statements delineated the extent of the broad, general education to which pupils were entitled up to the end of their third year in secondary school. They did not to apply to the final three years of secondary education.
The three cross-cutting themes; health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy were laid out, in that order, at the beginning of the document. The section for health and wellbeing covered nearly twice as many pages as any other area. Skills for learning were enumerated at four levels under the line of development, Planning for Choices and Changes, which marked the culmination of the description of this ‘set of skills’, which had been built up throughout the CfE documentation (see Figure 1). The theme of Health and Wellbeing also included statements of experiences and outcomes covering: self-awareness and self-worth, resilience and confidence, coping skills, managing thoughts and feelings, and managing change and risk. These statements were made under the line of development Mental, Emotional, Social and Physical Wellbeing and marked the blossoming of the movement towards personal micro-management, as predicted by Ranson (2008). Pupils were required to grade themselves against 18 criteria for the assessment of their emotions, personality and character.

Choice was seldom mentioned in this document except in Languages and English which listed Enjoyment and Choice as a line of development. Assessment is for Learning was included as a standard phrase for pedagogy in all except one of the curricular areas. There was no overall mapping of the curriculum in this document.

Conclusion

This analysis of the policymakers' attempts to make sense of 'the successful learner' reveals an increasing lack of balance in the interpretation and relations between the three characteristics of the concept that were identified earlier,

Looking at the commitment to increasing learners’ autonomy, the scope for choice and decision making by children and young people becomes progressively sidelined over the six years, only receiving serious consideration in the context of the early years (SE, 2007). From the start 'choice' carries a caveat (Scottish Executive, 2004 p.14) and learner autonomy ends up by reflecting current and historic practice, where the freedom to make educational choices by the young is limited on the grounds of immaturity and lack of judgment. The structural determination of educational opportunities through the way in which pupils are categorised and grouped by schools is not touched upon. The problems of transplanting practice from the non-compulsory adult education sector to schools are considerable. There is a far more uniform curricular structure based on a different set of relationships between learners, teachers and the curriculum, than is the case in adult education. Despite the commitment in Progress and Proposals (2006) to consult with schools on extending choice for pupils in the early years of their secondary education, there is no return to this issue later in the CfE series. The guidance as to what is encompassed by choice, and how it may be exercised by children, is restricted to the description of interviews where an adult provides personal support by agreeing and reviewing personal learning plans with pupils. Since this activity takes place within a framework for achievement where all listed learning experiences and outcomes must be
covered and assessed, conversations about choices, such as opting out of a subject and spending more time on another, or about when to learn and how to learn are unlikely to be offered.

Besides these structural considerations, the fundamental issue for learner autonomy of power and control is not dealt with. The initial statement of purpose and principles (Scottish Executive, 2004) outlines aspirations for a substantive change in relationships which is not addressed in subsequent documentation. The new curriculum requires a re-positioning of the respective roles of teachers and pupils and of their relationships to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment if young people are to become actively and critically engaged in learning amounting to a radical alteration of the dominant regulatory discourse in schools (Bernstein, 1971). The problem is papered over by the claim, repeated in several of the documents, that all that is required to inaugurate CfE is a change in pedagogy. Furthermore, the change in pedagogy is defined as the adoption of Assessment for Learning which is increasingly articulated as a series of summative/formative steps (peer and self-assessment) determined by measurable (levelled) descriptions of experience and outcomes. The creativity and criticality that formative assessment of classroom and school practice might have offered is thereby ‘made safe’ by simply inviting children to participate within the restrictive margins provided by an elaborated treadmill of assessment activities.

For much the same reasons, children and young people’s chances of becoming committed to learning through experiences of self-actualisation and self-direction will probably fare little better. If their scope for choice is severely limited then their sense of directing and controlling their own development is necessarily weakened. If reflection on experience is tied to considering the goals which have been set for them by others and is recorded by parroting phrases provided for them by others, this is unlikely to make the process motivating. ‘Learner-centredness’ has effectively been hollowed out by the removal of the child’s agency. At the same time, under the aegis of Health and Wellbeing, the range and power of assessment to determine, rather than act as a support for, development is substantively increased particularly through its penetration into the affective domain.

In contrast to the lack of detail about the first two characteristics of the learner, the descriptions of the personal learning skills that she must master become increasingly differentiated and detailed. By the end of the CfE series ‘assessment’ and ‘learning to learn’ have become largely synonymous. The requirement that learners continuously judge and record both their own and others’ progress carries the danger of becoming a burdensome form of ‘assessowork’ that will be driven by the need to provide evidence for ‘quality assurance’ and ensure ‘all the boxes are ticked’. It has been rightly argued that the practice of peer- and self-assessment allows children to experience a greater sense of autonomy and confidence because expectations are made clearer to them. In that sense, the teaching and learning process becomes more inclusive because a number of children gain greater access to a curriculum that was previously closed to them. However, if such a practice remains in the service of an essentially dictatorial and top-down determination
of what is on offer, it is merely an amelioration of the status quo, a pedagogy that lacks a transformational educational purpose.

What we appear to have in this short history of textual ‘events’ is an example of how one discursive form, the progressive, became increasingly invaded and modified by another, the oppressive. The resulting hybrid emerges, seemingly unnoticed and unchallenged, as something very far removed from what was hoped for. CfE was intended to mark a renewal of democratic engagement as part of Scottish devolution. The potential of ‘the successful learner’ to serve as an emancipatory concept seems to have been severely eroded in its on-going translation by national policymakers. Since in Scotland the policymakers include teachers, heads, local authority personnel and academics, this outcome cannot be viewed simply as the work of a malignant political cadre. How we are currently defining the ‘successful learner’ could be interpreted as a failure of imagination on all our parts.

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