Autonomy, Capacities and Personhood.

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A school is not a seminar, much less a philosophical seminar. It is an institution geared to educational practice, albeit practice which is inescapably laden … with value presuppositions and assumptions. McLaughlin (1994:459)

Curriculum for Excellence, Scotland’s 3-18 curriculum, has been described as ‘the most significant curricular change in Scotland for a generation’ (McAra, Broadley and McLauchlan, 2013:223). The broad aim of Curriculum for Excellence, hereafter CfE, is ‘to ensure that all children and young people in Scotland develop the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need to flourish in life, learning and work’. CfE ‘aims to develop’, and its purpose is ‘encapsulated’ in, four capacities to be progressed across the curriculum in order that learners become i) successful learners, ii) confident individuals, iii) responsible citizens, and iv) effective contributors. Each of these capacities is articulated via specific attributes and capabilities with their development further specified in experiences and outcomes, sets of statements describe learning and progression expectations for each of eight curriculum areas. Following CfE documentation, the very term experiences and outcomes ‘recognises the importance of the quality and nature of the learning experience in developing attributes and capabilities and in achieving active engagement, motivation and depth of learning’.

Accordingly, the four capacities, hereafter the 4Cs, are centre stage, underpinning each and every aspect of the curriculum. However, mapping the 4Cs across the curriculum and making sense of them with respect to practice and implementation is far from straightforward and CfE has, inevitably, come under fire.

Although not prescriptively detailed, Priestley and Humes (2010:356) suggest that CfE’s expression of content as outcomes may be in conflict with the developmental aims of the four capacities and they conclude that CfE is atheoretical and lacks conceptual clarity. Others, notably Gillies (2006:26), claim CfE is lacking in both ‘coherence and force’. We respond, here, to such claims whilst suggesting that, certainly, CfE requires further conceptual interrogation if it is to become more coherent, both philosophically and in practice. We acknowledge McLaughlin’s (1994:459) caution that schools are not philosophical seminars but institutions focused on educational practice and accept that coherence is a secondary concept that will only allow us to ‘fit things together’ when underlying principles have been identified. With particular reference to the 4Cs of CfE, we explore the principle of autonomy as it pertains to both individual and collective flourishing and turn to a philosophical scrutiny of the sort of person implied in those capacities.

While we focus on Scotland’s curricula initiative as the context for our discussion, the paper contributes to broader ongoing debates about the aims of education in liberal democracies. In sum, we concur with White’s (2011:10) view that a central aim of school education should be to enable ‘a life of autonomous well-being’ which, as we shall argue, relates directly to CfE’s focus on ‘flourishing’ and can be realised via the 4Cs. Initially, and briefly, we consider the views of some CfE critics and commentators, arguing that it is both possible and desirable to re-claim the 4Cs through the enhanced ‘sense-making’ that might allow us to arrive at a better ‘understanding of the key tenets of CfE and its underpinning philosophy’ called for by Priestley and Minty (2013:50). Accepting that the 4Cs could be [mis]appropriated in the guise of individualistic neo-liberal imperatives, we acknowledge, but seek to disarm, commonplace criticisms of autonomy by arguing that it might be put to work...
in CfE as a potentially multi-dimensional, context-sensitive concept that is relational as well as ‘emotional, embodied, desiring, creative and feeling’ (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000:21). Hence we focus on autonomy as a key element in a version of liberal education\textsuperscript{iii} which, we suggest, can be discerned in CfE. We conclude that the 4Cs lend themselves to re-consideration and re-mapping in pursuit of autonomy and flourishing that is premised on a view of personhood.

**Criticisms and Context**

Here we shall move from general criticisms of CfE, that go beyond the 4Cs to the core of CfE’s underlying principles to more specific criticisms, narrowing our focus towards the sort of learners implied in the 4Cs. The architects of CfE have been criticised for their failure to critically scrutinise and justify its purposes, values and principles with the result that the curriculum is ‘under-conceptualised’ (Humes, 2013:31). Paterson (2012) goes so far as to claim that CfE has ‘got nowhere’ because of its aspirational ‘vagueness’. Each of these criticisms are, to some extent, justifiable but, if valid, then they invalidate the overall CfE aim to ‘achieve a transformation in education in Scotland by providing a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum from 3 to 18’\textsuperscript{iv}.

The statements and various documents associated with CfE rarely provided philosophical justification for the organisation and content of the curriculum or, indeed, for the 4Cs. The Education (Scotland) Act 2000 set a legislative scene for change in post-devolutionary Scotland in which it became clear that Scotland was to position herself as egalitarian, inclusive and meritocratic with her public institutions the means of bringing about the ‘good society’\textsuperscript{v}. The philosophical underpinnings of the story (or myth) of Scotland as a just and fair country rests on the belief that, because of our common humanity, we are deserving of equal respect and treatment (Humes and Bryce, 2008). From 2002, extensive consultation was launched to survey public views on the state and quality of Scottish Education and in 2003, following that consultation, a Curriculum Review Group, comprising members representing key educational institutions from the early years, primary and secondary sectors, local authorities and the CBI, was established to oversee reform and ensure a consultative, collaborative approach to curriculum design. The aim of this process was never to provide philosophical justification for CfE, but to reflect the values and aspirations of the nation and enable the co-construction of a curriculum that was to be coherent whilst offering continuity and progression from 3-18. Whilst welcoming the consultative aims of the process, we might, however, agree with Humes (2013:19) that the resulting values in CfE are ‘asserted rather than argued for’, particularly with respect to the 4Cs.

In CfE one can identify clear instances of personhood, autonomy, rights, dignity and self-respect, all of which, Nussbaum (1999:56) suggests, are terms from the liberal Enlightenment that can usefully be re-formulated today. Closely connected and, probably, as hotly contested as the idea of autonomy is what it means to be a person. For Peters (1972:512), to be a person is connected conceptually with having an ‘assertive point of view, with evaluation, decision and choice’: a person shapes, to a certain extent, her own life plan. But, as we shall argue, persons are embodied and interdependent. Persons are social, not atomistic, and they are vulnerable to the
constraints of others. Importantly, though, if we pursue the connections between autonomy and personhood in and beyond CfE’s 4Cs then we quickly run up against charges centred on whose values should prevail and contested views of personhood.

Watson (2010:99) argues that CfE ‘is concerned with setting out not what children are expected to know, but how they should be’. There are two key related issues here: curricula emphasis and its starting point and, if that starting point is premised on how learners should be, then we will need consensus on understanding that being. With regard to the former issue, we follow White (2011) and defend starting with ‘large, overall aims’ from which one can move to specific aims. Advocating a curriculum that enables learners to be autonomous choosers, White (2011) argues that this is an aim well suited to our liberal democracy, premised on the ‘implicit assumption here that being an autonomous agent will help one to flourish, to lead a life of well-being rather than misery’. Such a view links easily to CfE’s emphasis on flourishing so if we take that to be synonymous with wellbeing then CfE is meeting White’s central aim of school education, ‘that it should help to equip all pupils for a life of autonomous well-being’. Contra concerns that to peg curricula aims on what children should be instead of what they should know may be perilous, White argues that starting from knowledge will fails to adequately acknowledge ‘what schools are for’, namely to allow ‘individuals to become authors of their own life story’. Articulated thus, then CfE and its 4Cs might be regarded as less sinister and more empowering but, of course, that judgement will depend, crucially, on one’s perspective, the second key point alluded to above. Watson is clear that CfE is aimed at producing the ‘good subject’, the ‘entrepreneurial self’, ‘subjectivities for the society of control and subjectivities capable of ‘self-programmability’. Biesta (2008:50) expresses similar concerns, suggesting that the 4Cs are overly focused on individual responsibility, traits, values and dispositions thereby reflecting a narrow and individualistic view of the learner that is insufficiently engaged with ‘wider social and political action’.

Priestley and Humes (2010:257) claim there is a strongly instrumental slant to CfE that could restrict the autonomy and critical thinking implied by the 4Cs. Even if autonomy and critical thinking are held desirable, autonomy as an element of a broader philosophical scrutiny of CFE, looks as if it needs more work, both in order to address criticisms of individualism and to offer a more detailed account of ways in which it might be played out in practice via the 4Cs.

**The 4Cs and Autonomy**

We acknowledge the challenges of interrogating autonomy by seeking to follow Standish’s (2003) call to ‘relate it to the rough ground’ (p.169), thinking of autonomy not as something to be ‘against’ or ‘for’ but delving into ways in which it ‘can fold back on itself’, accepting the challenges of varying concepts of freedom (p.170) and remaining vigilant to ‘a certain kind of individualism, often spoken of in terms of autonomy’ that may well have infiltrated the assumptions of policy makers and teachers (p. 171). Autonomy is, of course, rarely reducible to one thing and it is entirely appropriate, indeed essential, that autonomy is as contested as it is lauded in educational discourses, be that by philosophers of education, policy makers or practitioners. Autonomy is, as Dworkin noted, ‘a term of art’ but a concept for which we can, nonetheless, specify some general features such as that a person is ‘self-governing’ (1988:6). White (2003:147) offers a useful definition for our purposes: ‘An autonomous person is one who determines how he or she should live according to their own, unpressured, picture of a worthwhile life’. In common with many
conceptions of autonomy, that definition starts to specify the nature and character of the autonomous person or the conditions under which a person can be said to be autonomous. Thus understood, autonomy has long been a foundational principle of liberal and democratic philosophy and valued as an aim of education (Dearden, 1972; Peters, 1973; White, 1982; Wringe, 1997; Winch, 2006). However, as Standish notes, if autonomy is simply to be understood with respect to ‘the development of thought and understanding with some reference to independence of mind’ then we might ‘scarcely imagine educational practice that did not develop autonomy in some degree’ (2003: 170). Complexity, of course, arises with respect to what degree, for what reasons, for whom and to what ends we want to promote autonomy as a ‘good thing’.

It is also seems apparent that, despite some reservations that autonomy as an ideal promotes rationality over affect, and individualism over relationships, it is an important feature of the person and stands equivalent to many desirable qualities: dignity, integrity, independence, responsibility, self-knowledge, self-assertion, knowledge of one’s interests (Dworkin, 1998), and, thanks to the work of a number of liberal feminist philosophers, care for others (Westlund, 2009; MacKenzie, 2014; Oshana, 2014). Autonomy is related to actions, beliefs, reasons for acting, consideration of and respect for others, and critical thinking. Among the basic and common characteristics of autonomy are that the person is, to a degree, ‘self-deciding’, ‘self-choosing’, ‘self-determining’, ‘self-governing’ and ‘self-authoring’. On MacKenzie’s (2014:17-18) account, to be self-determining involves having the freedom and opportunities to make and enact choices of practical importance to the agent (an account close to Dearden, 1972). To be self-governing entails skills and capacities necessary for making choices and enacting decisions. To be self-authoring means having the ‘normative authority’ to be self-governing and self-determining and, following MacKenzie and as we shall see, the capacity to be self-authoring is of central concern in recent developments of relational autonomy. Fundamental to the concept of autonomy is that the person exercises reason so as to choose, decide, assess, evaluate and so on, in order that she can be ‘true to herself’, ‘think for herself’, ‘stand up for what she believes’ and be her ‘own person’ (Friedman, 2003). The reasoning person is conscious of her beliefs, wants and actions and can, usually, give reasons for what she does, feels or believes. The features of Dearden’s conception of autonomy are of two kinds: qualities of the person, such as self-knowledge, pride in accomplishment, respect for truth, morality and the dignity of others; and qualities of mind such as critical thinking, being able to assess what to do and why, which implies being able to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of certain courses of action, and to think through the likely consequences of chosen courses.

It is the task of schools in CfE to build motivation, resilience and confidence and independence, though autonomy does not appear in the 4Cs. Schools are indispensible social institutions in which to develop the critical rationality of pupils since they follow, obviously, a curriculum in which they will develop knowledge and understanding. The conditions, skills and dispositions required for critical rationality include critical thinking skills and virtues (dispositions) of character. Clearly pupils will benefit from an educational environment in which debate, discussion, dissent, speculation, doubt and questioning are permitted and encouraged, about any and across all ‘subjects’. The virtues educators help nurture in pupils in order to engage successfully in these social classroom practices include patience, respect for difference of opinion, courage to speak out or dissent, a willingness to give and accept
reasons, the ability to compromise and negotiate, to be open minded, all included in
the 4Cs capabilities and attributes. These virtues demand sensitivity to the social
context (what it is appropriate to do or say, and when), sensitivity to and respect for
others (‘other-regarding’ virtues) and self-awareness (Winch, 2006:53). Hence
autonomous qualities of mind do not merely entail the acquisition of technical skills
such as debate, forensic analysis or detecting fallacy (Passmore, 1972; Winch, 2006).
Rather, implementing the 4Cs across outcomes and experiences across curricula
areas, interdisciplinary learning, the ethos and life of the school and opportunities for
personal achievement, offers Scottish schools an opportunity to infuse each element
of the curriculum with both features of Dearden’s conception of autonomy: qualities
of the person and qualities of mind such as critical thinking.

However, if, in spite of CfE’s aims and 4Cs, learners are taught to examinations and if
the assessment regime does not keep up with curricula changes and innovations, then,
eventually, we will produce not critical thinkers, but well drilled pupils (Passmore,
1972). The relationship of critical thinking to critical rationality is one in which we
develop the capacity and disposition to form reasonably grounded opinions and
beliefs, to select and give reasons for one plan of action rather than another, and to
make informed and critical choices, all of which actions help develop the distinct
types of people we are. So the individual and rationality are inevitably implicated in
self-determined critical thinking and choices will be required. Much of the discussion
so far might incline critics to regard our perspective on autonomy to be so focused on
the intellectual that it is disengaged from the social milieu. In construing a defence of
autonomy in overly cognitive terms then we might come to think of individuals as
atomistic learners. We want to argue that autonomy can play a useful, if complex,
role in normative, social and educational practices and the 4Cs. But to do so we need
to address the argument that autonomy, so long coded as ‘masculine’ (Dryden, 2010),
is relational rather than, necessarily, individualistic.

The Need for Relational Autonomy

Feminist inspired accounts of relational autonomy draw attention to the familial,
social, cultural, and historical contexts in which agents are rooted and, as we shall see,
the 4Cs imply both that learning can be social and that it can serve social ends
although we will need to work across the capacities to reveal relational attributes and
capabilities. In the ‘successful learner’ capacity we find the capability of learning
independently ‘and as part of a group’. In the ‘responsible citizen’ category, ‘respect
for others’ and a ‘commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social
and cultural life’ are attributes with capabilities including knowledge and
understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it, an understanding of different
beliefs and cultures, the ability to make informed choices and decisions, to evaluate
environmental, scientific and technological issues and to develop informed, ethical
views of complex issues. Arguably each of these capabilities and attributes is
relational as are those in the capacity of ‘effective contributor’ in which we find the
capabilities of being able to communicate in different ways and different settings and
to work in partnership and in teams. Alongside these relational capacities, attributes
and capabilities are those more obviously focused on the individual so, in addition to
the ‘confident individual’ capacity with its focus on self respect, a sense of wellbeing,
secure values and beliefs and ambition, the individual is evident across each of the
remaining capacities. Accordingly we have ‘successful learners’ with enthusiasm and motivation for learning, a determination to reach high standards of achievement and an openness to new thinking and ideas, realized through capabilities that include thinking creatively and independently, learning independently, making reasoned evaluations and linking and applying different kinds of learning in new situations. Resonances of reason and individual autonomy appear in the ‘responsible citizens’ capacity with participation, the development of knowledge and understanding, the ability to make informed choices and decisions, evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues and develop informed, ethical views of complex issues. Finally, ‘effective contributors’ are to have the attributes of an enterprising attitude and self-reliance and, alongside communication and team working, to be able to take the initiative and lead, to apply critical thinking in new concepts, to create and develop and to solve problems. Attributes and capabilities to be cultivated include relating to and having respect for others, learning as part of a group, responsible participation in political, economic, social and cultural life, knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it, an understanding of different beliefs and cultures, and the development of informed, ethical views of complex issues, all of which require autonomy that is individual as well as relational.

Only on a crude, narrow understanding of autonomy, will individuals not be influenced by parents, peers, the community or culture. We do not make ourselves independently of others but are dependent and deeply enmeshed in social relations (Sandel, 1982; Jagger, 1984). Relational philosophers of autonomy would not disagree. Some argue that any wants, wishes, desires or plans we do have or make cannot really be our own since these are all traceable to biology, social upbringing, gender, friendships, schooling, religious values, the media, and so on. Again, there is little with which to disagree here for, of course, our identities and personalities are, to a degree, socially conditioned. We are moved by situations, not settled values or beliefs (Doris, 2002). We cannot really know ourselves because we labour under a ‘false consciousness’, absorbing the values and interests of those who have power over us (Marcuse, 1964) and, for Foucault, wherever power, whether familial, pedagogical, or political, operates, ‘the subject that is constituted as a subject – that is “subjected” - is one who obeys’ (1976). Such skeptical attitudes towards autonomy have been taken seriously by a number of feminists who have sought to revive and reconfigure the concept, reclaiming it as an emancipatory ideal for tackling inequality and oppression. As Veltman and Piper (2014:4) have observed, there is a considerable agreement that autonomous agency is ‘saturated with self-other relations’, which will include, of course, relations which might encourage false consciousness, abuses of power, and the effects of social conditioning. Purely procedural accounts of autonomy, in which an agent is assumed to be autonomous because she endorses her commitments following independent critical reflection, have been enriched by relational accounts, so reducing the abstract and idealised nature of such accounts and acknowledging the messiness of complex human relationships.

So, in the 4Cs, learners should be enabled to have self-respect and respect for others, to be able to relate to others and to act responsibly, to be committed to responsible, not necessarily responsibilised (Biesta, 2008), political, economic, social and cultural life. Pupils should be enabled to develop knowledge and understanding, to understand different beliefs and cultures, make informed choices and decisions, evaluate a variety of issues, and develop informed, ethical views of complex issues. These qualities point to relational autonomy: we have a relationship with ourselves and others and
CfE’s 4Cs point clearly to that sort of autonomy. However, the pervasive poststructuralist charge that our identities are contingent, fragmentary, non-autonomously chosen, and transitory remains.

Leaving the problem of interference, oppression and adaptive preferences aside, for the moment, and following Korsgaard (2009), we are the authors of our actions and to that extent we are self-constituting. We are responsible for forming our identities but we will acquire an identity in different ways. We are, of course, born into families and communities that nourish or corrupt our values and aspirations. There may be little choice in what we are or what do until we are presented with opportunities to become and do otherwise. We frequently adopt identities voluntarily, without much reason, drifting into communities, championing something out of fellow feeling, or following norms and conventions out of habit. Whether reasoned or arbitrary, chosen or the product of circumstances, these identities are, to an extent, contingent. Of course, the contingent can become grounded, or absolute, as when we adopt and embed long-term convictions and principles about the kind of life one ought to lead, and what we owe others as persons, and such grounded principles and concepts may or may not be pernicious, endangering or thwarting our own wellbeing and that of others. However, in many respects, we are consciously involved in the construction of our own life by the choices we select, the decisions we make, the plans of actions we follow although we may not have an ‘unpressurised’ picture of a worthwhile life in quite the way White (2003:147) proposes.

Every person has an individual form: we are individuated beings, to follow Peters (1966). That is, many of us are fortunate enough construct, shape, maintain, improve, create, destroy, abandon, seek out, fall into, desist, rebel, and so forth so that, to a great extent, we are responsible (answerable) for our own constitution, for the things we choose to do and become. And we do these things with others. Social conditions which limit, constrict, or forbid self-determining, self-choosing acts on the basis of sex, religion, language, community membership and so on are unjust. Relational autonomy is committed to the rights, welfare, dignity, freedom and equality of persons and recognises vulnerability and dependency. If not we would not need to talk about rights and entitlements, welfare or dignity. As autonomous persons we are potential and actual realizations of human possibility and human value, we are ‘a larger part of the human story’ but, also, ‘a co-author in the human story, our collective public story’ (Korsgaard, 2009:212). Individual autonomy will not be grounded on a view of persons with static, settled dispositions, values, principles and goals and the extent to which we exercise autonomy will vary according to contexts and will need evaluation on different levels. This returns us to Standish’s (2003:169) requirement to relate autonomy ‘to the rough ground’ and to avoid the individualism that may, consciously or not, have infused the assumptions and indeed the discourses of policy makers and teachers.

We may exercise local autonomy with respect to specific decisions or choices – the here and now, such as, for example, continuing with a subject in which one repeatedly fails to be successful. Following MacKenzie (2014), programmatic autonomous choices have broader application and may be concerned with career, intimate relationships, school choice, subject choices, and so on. Then there are autonomous choices which have global impact on one’s overall life plan, such as changing career, or entering higher education. This multi-dimension, context-dependent perspective on autonomy means that it is possible to assess a person as being highly autonomous in
one area of her life, less so in another, and possibly oppressed or controlled in yet another. A pupil may have a great deal of autonomy in one class, being free to voice her opinions, to present her work in her preferred way, and to sit with her closest friend. In another class, taught by a teacher with very different views on education and discipline, this same pupil will be silent, passive and obedient, having little control over what she can do and with whom she can sit (local autonomy). This pupil may be in a faith based school which restricts some topics related to sex education, say the discussion of contraception, while at home her parents may encourage her to learn about sex through open and honest discussion, yet with controlled access to the internet (programmatic and global autonomy). Understanding that intimate relations rest on respect and dignity may have a global impact on a person’s overall wellbeing and in assessing the extent of a person’s autonomy, interference, oppression or adaptive preferences may appear in few or many contexts, or on few or many levels.

An individual will need to speak on her own behalf, to that extent to voice her autonomy and to do so in ways that transcend each of the 4Cs, as a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor. And it is here, across the 4Cs, that a particular view of personhood might usefully infuse the capabilities and attributes of the curriculum in order that respect for persons, ourselves and others, can help us to address charges of individualism and a lack of coherence.

**A View of Personhood**

CfE is a work in progress, a curriculum designed to avoid prescription and so, almost inevitably, a curriculum that can be charged with accusations of vagueness and, certainly, a curriculum that will demand translation. There are limitations to be sure. Explicit references to how the 4Cs can help disable prejudicial thinking, challenge inequality and oppression, sexism, racism, and so forth are absent. It is not clear how pupils can become self-deciding, self-governing, self-authoring and self-determining. So, too, it is perfectly reasonable to ask what we mean by ‘responsible’ citizens and to be cautious lest the capacity of the confident individual becomes an indicator of individualism or the successful learner a product of an instrumental curriculum. Arguably, it was not the intention of the curriculum architects to set out in detail what kinds of persons our pupils were to become but it is clear enough, in the 4Cs, that various aspects of personhood are to be valued although it is not adequately clear how these are to fit together in ways that might afford all learners to flourish, individually and collectively. Here we offer an opening discussion of personhood and do so because that seems to us an essential, and currently absent, platform from which to re-examine the 4Cs.

We have already asserted that an autonomous person will be, to a degree, self-authoring and argued that the ability of individuals to choose and follow their own conception of life is an ‘indispensable condition of individual well-being’ (Winch, 2006:1). Since a key characteristic of autonomy is the use of one’s reason, the capacity to make rational and informed decisions is critical to pursuing and sustaining one’s conception of life, and to the development of the person. It is also important to the educational development of the person that they have the resources to subject the claims, beliefs, perhaps even the wishes of others, to critical assessment. A valuable
characteristic of the autonomous person is, as we have seen, critical rationality and autonomy is ‘positively valued’ both because of what it enables us to do and be and because of the ‘satisfactions of exercising this kind of agency and the dignity which it is felt to accord to the agent’ (p.460). This satisfaction is felt because we exist through and benefit from our own activities, deriving satisfaction from the products of our own action, seeing ourselves realised and completed in them (Aristotle, NE 1186a 1-10). To deny this kind of agency, or to circumscribe the conditions under which we can exercise agency, and so autonomy, is to reduce the dignity of the person. Hence dignity, one’s own and that of others, coupled with respect, again self-respect and respect for others, are the central planks of personhood on which, we suggest, the 4Cs should be premised.

Kant (1998), from whom so many accounts of respect derive, held that respect for persons derived from respect for the moral law and failing to show respect for a person implies that we do not take her seriously as an agent with the capacity to determine her own pattern of life, effectively disregarding her feelings and intentions, and what matters to her in important areas of her life. In Peters’ (1966) terms a person, as opposed to an individual, is one who is conscious of herself as a person with an ‘assertive point of view’ (p.210), that includes judgements, appraisals, intentions and decisions. Individuals are persons when society recognises them as ‘centres of valuation, decision and choice’, whose ‘consciousness is individuated into distinct centres, linked with distinct physical bodies, and with distinctive points of view’ (p.211). Entailed in the concept of respect, therefore, is the concept of the person. To encourage open-mindedness, to develop an appreciation and respect for other cultures and points of view, while relating to others, arguably, encourages respect for persons. We follow Nussbaum’s perspective of liberalism (1999:57) in the face of feminist [and other] critiques here, asserting that human beings ‘are of equal dignity and worth’ and ‘that the primary source of this worth is a power of moral choice within them, a power that consists in the ability to plan a life in accordance with one’s own evaluation of ends’. In so doing, we acknowledge that the ‘separateness of persons is a basic fact of human life’ (Nussbaum,1999:62), that no person should be treated as the means to another’s ends but argue that, not least because this particular form of liberalism focuses on ‘respect for others as individuals’ (p.60), this concept of personhood is neither individualistic nor egoistic. Moreover, this account of personhood does not rely on a normative concept of self-sufficiency, such as a neoliberal entrepreneurial self (Kelly, 2006; Watson, 2010) might suggest. Rather, it is premised on the sort of other-regarding motives demanded by others whilst our individual separateness remains.

Premising the 4Cs on such a view of personhood allows us to invoke its maxims, respect, dignity and reason, as a yardstick, an ideal against which to evaluate the value of respective capacities, capabilities and attributes. This sets the concepts of personhood as the ideal in preference to idealizing autonomy and it sets autonomy free to work in pursuit of flourishing for all in CfE. So, for example, the successful learner who is determined ‘to reach high standards of achievement’ will also be ‘open to new thinking and ideas’ and, as an autonomous learner, able to think and learn creatively, independently and with others whilst drawing on her capacity to make reasoned evaluations and decide for herself what conclusions to draw from a plethora of sources. At the same time, and as a confident individual, she will be encouraged to develop self respect whilst, drawing from the responsible citizen capacity, developing respect for others. So, on our account, and in this example, a confident autonomous
learner would be encouraged to draw on capabilities and attributes across the 4Cs and, indeed, we would re-map those by reference to the tenets of personhood. Accordingly, with regard to respect and other-regarding motives that start from but cannot, by definition, be restricted to the individual, then we would have a cluster of capacities, capabilities and attributes related to ‘respect for self and others’. The potentially egoistic, atomistic confident learner will understand that self-respect and respect for others are in greater alignment than an initial casting of the 4Cs might suggest. Similarly, the confident individual’s sense of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing will articulate with her ability to make reasoned evaluations that allow her to make informed choices and decisions and develop informed, ethical views of complex issues (from the responsible citizen capacity) that might also ask her to apply critical thinking in new concepts and problem solving (from the effective contributor capacity) to issues of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing across the globe. The confident learner attribute of ambition would be tempered by challenges of affording each individual dignity and worth and the responsible citizen would be empowered to make her own choices with regard to responsible participation in political, economic, social and cultural life.

Conclusion

There is no reason, we suggest, why schools could not utilise the 4Cs effectively, well beyond any current use as slogans and mantras, in pursuit of the aim of CfE ‘to ensure that all children and young people in Scotland develop the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need to flourish in life, learning and work’. Successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors are capacities that might well be revitalised by asking what they might mean for personhood and flourishing. We have argued here that CfE is not atheoretical although it demands greater conceptual clarity and we have acknowledged that assessment must follow, not lead the curriculum. In order that examinations do not become the sole end of CfE, Cockburn (2010) suggests that the 4Cs might be better not regarded as ends, ‘as destinations’, but as ‘philosophical ideas that ought to underpin teaching and learning’, as guiding principles that are ‘not to do with behaviour to be measured but …philosophical concepts that underpin and inform all that we do in schools’. The time is right, now, to engage in a deep and concerted exploration of such philosophical concepts. Here we have taken autonomy as a key concept and argued that, premised on concepts of personhood, this offers a useful way forward, for both interrogation and translation into practice. To return to our McLaughlin epigraph, a school is not a philosophical seminar and so it is in practice, in staffroom, classrooms and continuing professional development that teachers might rescue CfE from accusations that it lacks coherence and force. Perhaps teachers, like their pupils, perhaps need more encouragement and greater support to become autonomous authors of their own professional narratives and translations in putting CfE and its 4Cs to work.

REFERENCES


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1. http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/understandingthecurriculumasawhole/index.asp with all CfE references to here unless otherwise noted

Of course, we are aware of the complexities of describing education as ‘liberal’ and we accept W. Carr’s notion that liberalism has the capacity ‘to present itself in a number of different guises’ (2003: 162).

http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/

An overview of the many policies, reports and reviews that have been produced since 1997 testifies to the egalitarian and inclusive aspirations of Scottish policy makers.

Hence the ‘secure values and beliefs’ of the ‘confident individual’ capacity might demand reconsideration.