A Comparative Paper Assessing the Appropriateness of Embedding Deep Personalisation and Educational Essentialism within the UK Further and Higher Education Sectors The STeP Journal Student Teacher Perspectives Copyright © 2016 University of Cumbria Vol 3 (1) pages 158-172

Jonathan Miles University Campus Oldham

Abstract

The motivation behind writing the paper is to compare two opposite theoretical viewpoints, which are deep personalisation and education essentialism and to analyse their appropriateness for implementation in the UK further and higher education sectors. Thus providing a varying framework from the personalisation framework recommended in the Department for Education and Skills 'White Paper' (DfES, 2005). The approach included analysis of previous literature, but also primary research aimed towards educational professionals with a perspective of providing an appropriate structure. The results were mixed, with neither theories holding suitable ground for implementation, however a combination of deep personalisation and educational essentialism provides a feasible option for teaching in further and higher education institutions. This paper proposes that at the beginning of a course or subject core skills should be learnt in an essentialist form. Moving onwards a personalised approach should be used for learners to specialise in a specific area, thus embedding creativity and responsibility for learners to generate motivation. It cannot be considered as deep personalisation due to assessments not being wholly student centred. Although the argument provides a strong basis to combine both theoretical perspectives, in certain aspects this is not possible. The marketisation of education is one of them; this framework will assume the deep personalisation approach of education as being a competitive market as it provides development and improvement within the market. However, assessments using this structure will embrace educational essentialism with shallow personalisation, as the current education structure does not allow for deep personalisation.

Key words

Educational Essentialism; Deep Personalisation; Further Education; Higher Education; Personalisation.

Introduction

Campbell et al (2007) advocated that deep personalisation occurs when teachers become advisers and brokers of services, helping learners to generate their own pathway through learning. However Bagley (1938) provides another insightful theory that stands at the opposite end of the pedagogy spectrum. He states that positive elements can be perceived in an educational theory; this finds its basis in the necessary dependence of the immature upon the mature for guidance, instruction and discipline. The Campbell Report traces the concept of deep personalisation, and for the purpose of this paper Charles Leadbeater's comprehensive outlining of deep personalisation will be scrutinised in terms of implementation into the UK further and higher education sectors. Secondly, a report from

Citation

Miles, J. (2016) 'A Comparative Paper Assessing the Appropriateness of Embedding Deep Personalisation and Educational Essentialism within the UK Further and Higher Education Sectors', *The STeP Journal*, 3(1), pp.158-172.

1938 written by William Bagley outlines a radically different style of pedagogy. His paper focuses towards American education, however is still highly applicable to the UK. The appropriateness of both education sectors is supported by Universities UK (2014) that suggest strong similarities between both education systems; with both countries having twelve years of compulsory education, also both having a 99% literacy rate in the total population. Government spending on education also has resemblances, with the US spending 5.62% of the overall budget on education and the UK spending 6.30%.

The paper will draw from previous literature and primary research conducted, thus evaluating the effectiveness of the theories but also highlighting implementation issues, ultimately producing a development of pedagogy in further and higher education.

Review of existing literature

Deep personalisation relates to helping learners generate their own pathway through learning. Although the major criticism of personalisation is the wide variety of interpretations that can be made, the major argument against deep personalisation within the UK Education sector is the difficulty to implement it fully. This is due to the Department of Education's control over curriculums and assessments, enhanced by their reluctance to relinquish these controls. Although this is not a direct criticism towards the Department of Education, Lawton (1975) states that this approach of deep personalisation would shatter the education system as it currently has a unifying function within society embedding young people into the common culture. Campbell et al. (2007) also outline obstacles to Leadbeater's theory, it would create barriers such as cultural, intellectual and financial, therefore creating large inequalities in the education system. The underlying impacts of social and economic status mean those with higher incomes and class statuses would generally be able to exploit the advantages of personalisation. However Leadbeater (2003) highlights that with careful design deep personalisation need not widen inequalities. Nevertheless inequalities are still apparent within the UK's Education System, more noticeably towards the higher education sector. Oxford University (2013) undergraduate admissions highlighted that 43.2% of admissions into Oxford were from the independent sector, and this is unproportionately high in relation to the size of each sector. Supporting this Paton (2013) suggests that 64% of students from independent schools went on to these universities in 2010/11, compared with 24% from state schools. This 40% gap outlines that a strategy for deep personalisation must not merely maintain the breach between sectors it needs to vastly reduce them.

In 2005 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) produced the 'White Paper'. The paper highlights five main personalisation traits: high levels of student expertise, progressivism, student centred, high levels of task behaviour and student self-motivation. DfES (2005) suggest that personalisation means a tailored education for all learners, thus giving them strengths in the basics, stretching their aspirations, and building life opportunities. The frameworks defined do not align with Leadbeater's deep personalisation theory, therefore can be summarised as somewhat shallow personalisation. This is due to the lack of co-designing and co-producing of their own learning, which is still held at the top of the hierarchy with the Department of Education. Campbell et al. (2007) stated that the 'White Paper' had almost no reference to student voice and choice appears to be limited. Although co-producing is considered as deep personalisation within the paper the suggestion is that this would only occur between the teachers and parents, not the students themselves. Harris and Ranson (2005) suggested one issue as to why deep personalisation

was not incorporated within the 'White Paper'; this was due to the fact that customising education does not align with the marketisation of education through parental choice.

Gilbert (2007) conducted a review that was overseen by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) and outlined that a deep sense of personalisation is required. Major aspects of the paper outlined schooling as a transformational process, strengthening learners' voice and conceptualising learners as 'partners' in learning. This is closely related to Leadbeater's concept of deep personalisation. However incorporating this model into all levels of education is theoretically difficult due to the self-motivation and co-designing of younger learners. Whereas focusing on the lifelong learning sector the theory creates a strong and innovative model of learning. The lifelong learning sector can be considered appropriate for deep personalisation due to the high levels of intelligence and increased self-motivation. Also mature students or those in further and higher education are more likely to be suitable for deep personalisation as they self-organise and want to co-design and co-produce. Campbell et al. (2007) support the previous statement by suggesting deep personalisation of education can be envisaged with older and more able students, the model would be successfully realised in universities or 16+ colleges with students who have a high salience and maturity.

Although students partaking in further and higher education would be more suitable for deep personalisation the argument of how they can be graded or defined is still apparent. As previously stated, deep personalisation allows learners to create their own pathway however during courses learners are still not experts in their subject specialism therefore may not hold the best opinion in how their education and further ambitions will be benefited. Ultimately a 'yard stick' of success or the level of learning must be apparent in establishing the knowledge gained and further career suitability for learners. It has been identified that shallow personalisation does occur within institutions although the purpose of the model is for learners to design and create pathways of their choice to succeed; this includes teaching methods, assessment forms and reflection styles.

The deep personalisation model has close connections with the learning theory of constructivism, where the role of the teacher is to enter into dialogue with the leaners. Powell, Farrar and Cohen (1985) suggested that teachers have embraced constructivist-based pedagogy with an enthusiasm that is rare in the days of quick-fixes and a shopping mall approach to school improvement. In a perfect environment deep personalisation would be somewhat possible. However the limited resources that the majority of learning institutions face provide an impossible situation if all learners incorporated deep personalisation, a classroom of twenty plus learners would be ineffective, movement towards small tutor groups or individual tutorials would be necessary to embed this concept. Tutors, teachers and lecturers do not have the time or resources available to make this learning concept a possibility.

Essentialists believe that there is a common core of knowledge that needs to be transmitted to students in a systematic and disciplined manner. Bagley (1938) suggests that positive elements can be perceived in educational theory, which finds its basis in the necessary dependence of the immature upon the mature for guidance, instruction and discipline. This theory has a highly conservative perspective of intellectual and moral standards that learning institutions should teach. Within these standards students learning is focused around hard work, respect for authority and discipline.

Authoritarianism is an ugly world, but when those who detest it carry their laudable rebellion against certain of its implications so far as to reject the authority of plain facts, their arguments, while well adapted perhaps to the generation of heal, become lamentably lacking in light

(Bagley, 1938, p.6).

This states that society was against authority in the teaching profession; however, essentialism states that this is the most effective form of learning, providing a systematic, fair approach to learning in society. Essentialism is about preserving the past in a fixed and objective manner of teaching; the emphasis of the approach is on the teacher as opposed to the learner, with the teacher passing on the 'essential' knowledge to students in an authoritarian methodology. The subject matter holds its own self-importance and in today's society the main subject focuses would be English language, English literature, Maths and ICT. These subjects are somewhat different to the initial subjects highlighted; Bagley (1938) stated that society should be based upon the arts. However it can be understood that the advancements of society and culture mean that the new subject matters are the vital topics for essentialism. These are taught in a disciplined manner with the teacher adopting a lecture style (monologue) approach dominated by instruction to the learners. Within this process students assume the form of receptacle learners who receive knowledge and are passive. The concept suggests that excellence in education will be achieved through compliance with authority, knowledge and discipline, resulting in academic rewards and jobs based on the individual's merit. Community benefits will also be achieved through the acceptance of group values, cooperative and conforming behaviour resulting in a successful introduction to society.

'A democratic society has a vital, collective stake in the informed intelligence of every individual citizen. That a literate electorate is absolutely indispensable not only to its welfare but to its very survival' (Bagley, 1938, p.4). This statement highlights that essentialism implies that education is of importance to the learner but it also enables the functions of society to continue successfully. To some extent the subject areas of modern essentialism are actively embedded in all subject areas, through the embedding of 'core skills'. Although the major differences between current guidance and essentialism are the teaching methods used to incorporate them. In a 21st Century community essentialism would focus on these core skills initially and subjects would be focused towards what society requires, other subjects that are not required would be classed as "only tools, and when a workman needs a tool he goes to the shop and gets its" (Thorndike, 1935, p.25). Although this can be considered an outdated statement it does hold certain ground in an evolving society. This is due to technological advancements; machines/ computers are replacing many manual occupations. Bagley (1938) also suggests that social security is similar to responsible freedom; it is a conquest not a gift. Therefore learners must have these 'core skills' to access social security. Within the UK social security can be considered as disability allowance, job seekers allowance and the National Health Service (NHS) etc. Through the analysis of educational essentialism certain positive factors can be attributed to the concept. A positive aspect is the stability it would provide in the education sector as all teaching and subjects would be generalised in accordance to the model, therefore ensuring all learners have strong English, Maths and ICT skills. One aspect for debate is the lack of competition that the market would face and the prospect of the education profession turning into a monopoly. Also how would private education facilities be controlled to adhere to these guidelines?

Authors of essentialism would agree the model provides a strong academic foundation for learners to become part of society; this can be achieved by covering all the basic aspects that individuals require to become part of a community. Educational essentialism also provides a systemic approach to education, providing learners with assessment throughout the particular courses, therefore showing the success or failure. On the other hand, essentialism can undermine the role of the learner in the educational process, as they are considered passive, and their role in the classroom environment to respect authority and have a fixed and rigid approach to learning. Another negative aspect of the model is the cultural 'lag' that the model can cause society. The theory looks at educating learners in an objective manner and preserving the past, this consequently could result in a lack of cultural development as future generations creativity and development would be limited through the disciplined nature of essentialism. Andalo (2007) discovered within her article in The Guardian that there was a 'small positive impact' on a child's progress when the secondary school had to compete for pupils with at least one other neighbouring school. This aligns with the HM Government (2007) who stated that vigorous competition between firms is the lifeblood of strong and effective markets. However the model suggested by Bagley creates little to no differentiation between institutions, therefore the market is considered as one product, creating a stagnant and ineffective market susceptible to limited growth and development. The final concern that can be related to essentialism is the lack of 'nonacademic' subjects. Students in an essentialist classroom are not as free to explore, question and test academic material in the way that other philosophies permit. The model does not acknowledge the importance of extra curricular activities and subjects such as music, drama and sports.

Methodology

The general research question concerns the implementation of deep personalisation and educational essentialism, also providing an insight into professional educators' viewpoints related to the format of teaching practice, and the purpose of education. A variety of educators participated during the research all teaching within further and higher education, with a range of subject specialisms. Convenience sampling was used during the research process with educators from: University Campus Oldham, Oldham College, University of Worcester, Staffordshire University and Churchgate Academy. The approach adopted for the paper was deductive which is the dominant research approach in scientific research; it enables the framework to focus on the opinions of participants, relating them to theorists whilst also taking into account implementation factors. Hussey and Hussey (1997) indicate that deductive research laws provide the basis of explanation, permit the anticipation of phenomena, predict their occurrence and allow them to be controlled. The top-down process provides a logical format for collecting results in a specific sector. The research was conducted in a questionnaire format with closed-answer questions, this was analysed using statistical analysis in accordance to the deductive method adopted. Voluntary informed consent was gained from the participants before undertaking any research. All participants in the process were given detailed information on why their participation was necessary and were informed of how and to whom the results would be communicated. All ethical standards were adhered to and all participants in the process were assured that they would be treated fairly and sensitively and an assurance was made that confidentiality would be maintained at all times. Participants did not have to provide any personal information therefore strictly adhering to confidentiality. Throughout the data collection process, all primary data collected was stored in an external hard drive device with an encrypted password for access, therefore making it highly secure. Also after completion of the research

paper the data will be destroyed making it impossible for the data to be used again for any purpose other than within this paper.

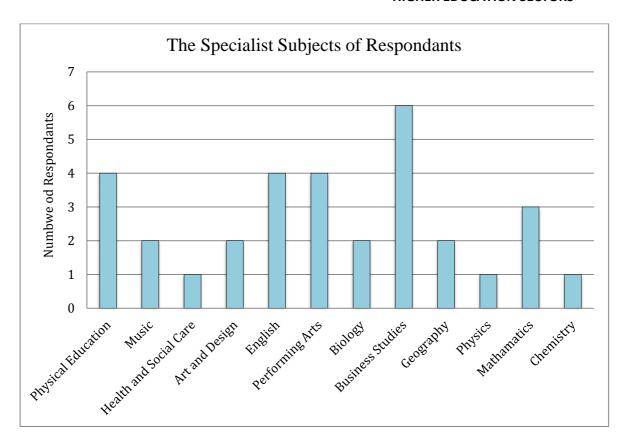
Questionnaire

The questionnaire was delivered in two formats, hard copies and online forms. This provided the flexibility to be able to gain results from academic practitioners further afield. The beginning of the questionnaire states that participants must only complete if they are occupying one of these roles: teacher/tutor/lecturer/student teacher. This was to ensure that all partakers were applicable for the research. Participants then stated their subject specialism; for the purpose of analysis these were grouped into broader academic subjects in an attempt to find patterns related to subject specialisms. The first section of the questionnaire consisted of five questions all used to gain an insight into the educators' opinion of teaching methods, with the second question used to determine if implementation of a particular theory would be practical. The fifth question advanced onwards from teaching methods, asking the participant to state their personal opinion for the purpose of education, is it for societal development or personal development, with the answer being in a percentage format. This related directly to deep personalisation and educational essentialism, as generally deep personalisation is focused around the advancement of individuals, whereas educational essentialism focuses around the improvement of society. The final section consisted of statements directly relating to personalisation or essentialism, the participants were asked to respond with either: strong disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The responses available were an adjustment of the 7-point Likert scale, narrowing the options down to five allowed participants to make a more considered response, as the 'middle ground' options are reduced.

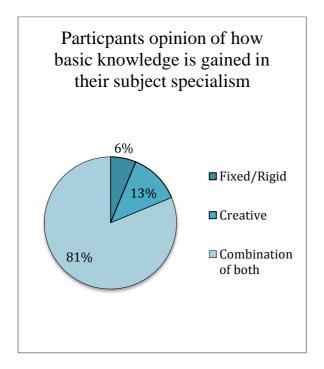
Results

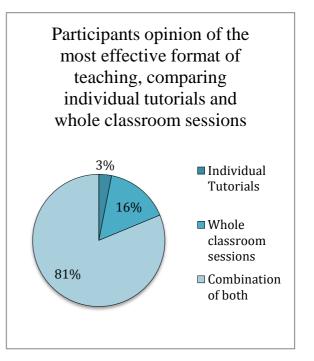
The chart below highlights the participants' subject specialisms; they have been grouped into twelve broad categories. All respondents were contacted directly and are all from University of Worcester, Churchgate Academy or University Campus Oldham. Using three institutions provide a range of subject specialisms, but also a range of further and higher education levels.

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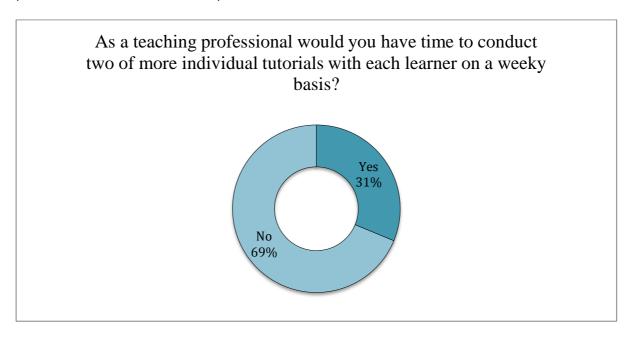


Below is a comparison between the responses that participants gave to how they believe basic knowledge of their subject specialism is gained and their opinion of the most effective format of teaching. The results provide inconclusive evidence for both deep personalisation and educational essentialism, as responses for both questions show an 81% majority for the combination of both. Creative teaching and individual tutorials can be directly related to deep personalisation and fixed teaching and whole classroom environments are linked to educational essentialism. Although, the results do show that it would be unlikely that one theory used independently would be beneficial for the development of education.



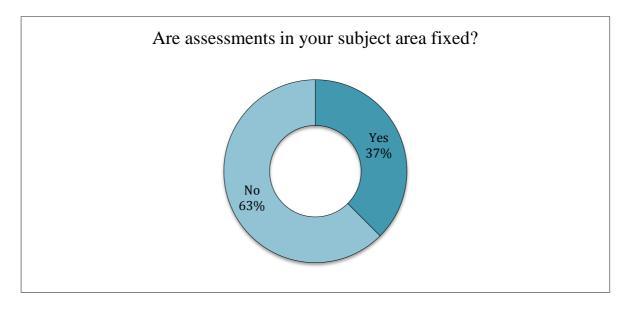


As previously stated deep personalisation requires a high level of individual tutorials, the chart below signifies the implementation issues that deep personalisation would face. 69% of teaching professionals stated that they would not be able to conduct two or more individual tutorials for each learner, therefore jeopardising the effectiveness of deep personalisation if it were to be implemented.

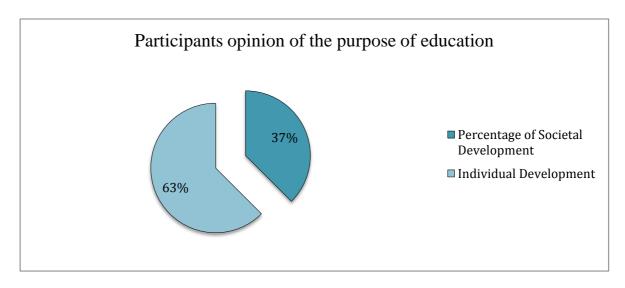


The DfES (2005) highlighted within the 'white paper' the implementation and education reform focused around shallow personalisation, however this does not aligned with Leadbeater theory of deep personalisation, the reasoning behind this is the Department for Education and Skills control over assessments. Therefore the question was posed to respondents if they felt their assessments are fixed. The results suggest that the majority of educators (63%) believe that assessments are not fixed. This may be the case, however a

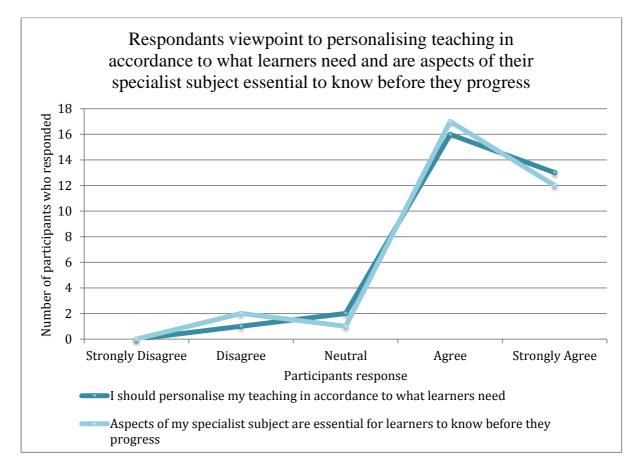
certain amount of flexibility does not suggest that deep personalisation would occur. For this learners need total responsibility and freedom over their own assessments.



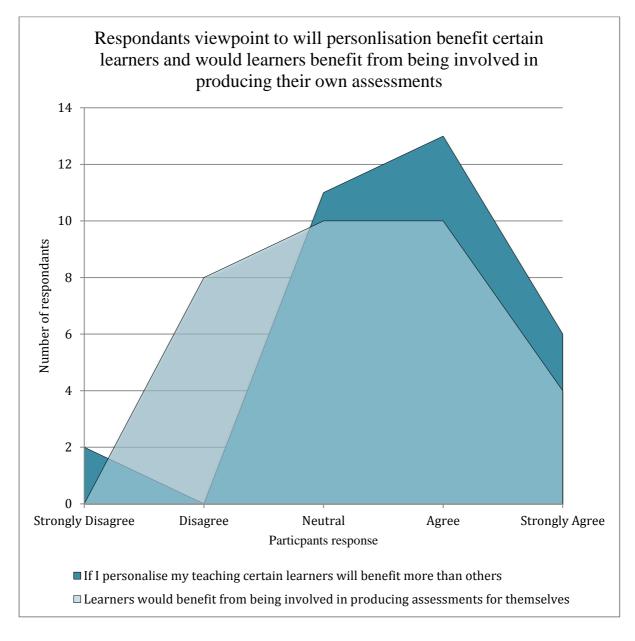
The purpose of education is a complicated issue that will not be addressed in depth during this research paper, however in relation to the two theories of education reform it is significantly apparent. The development of educational essentialism is for the purpose of societal development, whereas deep personalisation focuses on the individual thus ultimately benefiting society, which is arguable. The results suggest that professional educators believe that the purpose of education is predominantly for the development of individuals (63%) with society accounting for (37%) of the purpose of education.



The chart below signifies the relationship between the responses of two questions within the research. Participants' results show an agreement with the essentialist theory, with aspects of a subject need to be learned before progression takes place. These responses are aligned with educators agreeing that personalisation of teaching should be in accordance to what learners need. The relationship between these two questions shows that learning should be personalised and it is essential that learners gain a basic knowledge first. This, therefore, suggests that both theories analysed in this paper have a role within further and higher education.



The graph illustrates the association between the partaker's responses on their agree/disagreement to 'If I personalise my teaching certain learners will benefit more than others' and 'Learners would benefit from being involved in producing assessments for themselves'. The graph shows that the majority of respondents agreed with the first statement, this aligns with criticisms of deep personalisation, such as Campbell et al. (2007) suggesting that deep personalisation would create barriers such as cultural, intellectual and financial. Limited clear evidence was provided that learners would benefit from being involved in producing their own assessments, this therefore suggests the 'White Paper' produced by the Department for Education and Skills was accurate and beneficial to learners. However, analysing deeply shows that 75% of respondents answered in the range of 'neutral' and 'strongly agree'. Within this 43.75% either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement. This provides evidence for the usage of deep personalisation.



Discussion

Personalisation is a common debate within recent education reform, however it has been highlighted during this paper that personalisation comes in many forms, the most noticeable two are shallow and deep personalisation. The DfES (2005) stated that personalisation was occurring within learning environments and it relates to giving learners the basic strengths which, for the purpose of this paper, can be defined as 'core skills', pushing aspirations and creating opportunities for future development. However this framework does not align with Leadbeater's Deep Personalisation theory, this is due to learners not co-designing and co-producing their own learning. This is due to the rigid, hierarchical nature of the Department of Education, with the outlining of important decisions occurring at the top of hierarchy, deep personalisation cannot be implemented. However, research within this paper suggests confusion as to whether learners would benefit from co-producing assessments for themselves. With 56.25% of education professionals stating that they either 'disagree' or are 'neutral' to the statement that learners would benefit from being involved in producing assessments.

However education essentialism can be conducted with the current hierarchical structure that education has in the UK, the model would support this structure and require a strong hierarchal process to make the model possible. This theory also provides clear and defined measurements for success and grading purposes, with no barriers to success for learners, as a generalised education will be enforced throughout the UK. Supporting this are the implementation issues that deep personalisation faces with 69% of education professionals within the research suggesting they would be unable conduct the tutorials that deep personalisation requires. Research implies that personalisation should be apparent within education. The statement 'I should personalise my teaching in accordance to what learners need' provided the counter argument, as 90.625% of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with this statement. Supporting this 13% of participants stated that students learn most effectively within in a creative environment opposed to just 6% stating a fixed/ rigid approach, however 81% propose a combination of both.

Whereas deep personalisation adopts almost the opposite approach with learning being individual not only for each institution, but designed to be individual for each learner, making creativity and choice of the center of the learning progression. Although Lawton (1975) suggests that deep personalisation would ruin education, which has a unifying role in society of embedding learners into common culture. Also measuring learners' success with the theory of deep personalisation is under question due to the individual learner having different objectives that will be achieved using different formats, therefore grading and success cannot be completed accurately. More importantly this would affect future ambitions of learners into higher education or employment.

The competitive environment in education is an underlying topic that is relevant to the possible success of both these theoretical viewpoints, each offer a very different aspect of education being classed as a competitive market. Educational essentialism outlines that the education sector should not be considered a competitive market for institutions engineered to act as public service providing equal opportunity to all participants of education. This initially seems a positive and fair approach for education, however competition within a market place drives improvement and development of the product/ service, which in this case, is education. Therefore operating it as is outlined above could make education stagnant with little to no improvement. Whereas deep personalisation outlines a private sector approach that is common in the majority of market places, competitiveness is strong which delivers constant improvement and organisations look to better services and facilities for consumers (learners). As stated, this is one of the major differences between the two theoretical approaches. During the questionnaire learners were asked for their opinion on the purpose of education in a percentage format, with the results showing 37% for societal development and 63% for personal development.

Assessing both models in relation to society provides an interesting debate on how culture is defined. For the purpose of this paper culture will be defined as, "the derivatives of experience, more or less organised, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves" (Avruch, 1998). Essentialism is fixated towards embedding culture from an historical viewpoint, therefore ensuring that all learners are integrated into society. Conversely, the model does not take into account the development of society through political, economical, social and technological aspects. This therefore creates a stagnant system for educational development thus impacting on society creating a stationary society. On the other hand deep

personalisation does not attempt to embed historical viewpoints on culture in learners, therefore it can be assumed that deep personalisation would actively encourage developments in culture, although a negative would be that not all learners would be integrated into society due to the highly individual nature of the system.

Equality in education is necessary in generating equality in society, ensuring individuals have equal possibilities to succeed and no judgments are made towards the nine protection characteristics outlined by the Department for Education (2010) in the Equality Act: age, sex, race, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, marriage/civil partnerships. Campbell et al. (2007) suggests that deep personalisation would create obstacles such as, cultural, intellectual and financial, thus creating large inequalities. This would impact on social and economic statuses, meaning those with higher incomes and class statuses would be able to exploit the advantages of the model. Ultimately this would create a tiered education system that does not comply with the process of equality. However, essentialism reiterates that all learners are treated the same, creating high levels of equality for society. This then equates to the route purpose of learning. It can be highlighted that deep personalisation is suited towards bettering the individual, whereas the purpose of educational essentialism is to improve and maintain society. "Although over- simplification is always dangerous, one with this caution may contrast these two theories of education by certain conflicting concepts summed up in pairs such opposites as 'individual vs society', 'freedom vs discipline', 'interest vs effort', 'play vs work" (Bagley, 1938).

Creativity versus discipline provides the core argument for the two theories. From previous analysis it can be defined that Essentialism (the disciplined) approach provides security for democracy and society, conversely Deep Personalisation (the creative) theory does not secure the future of education or for society in general however it does provide the framework for individuals and society to advance. This progressive nature ensures an educational system that provides limitless opportunities for individuals. Nevertheless participants were somewhat reluctant to create a firm opinion to either a creative or a rigid approach to teaching, with 81% stating a combination of both would be the most effective teaching format, thus suggesting that neither theoretical approach alone would be suitable for implementation in UK further and higher education, instead adopting a mixed method approach would be most effective.

Conclusion

It has been indicated that both deep personalisation and education essentialism have underlying benefits and issues, however research indicates that a combination of both, although not in their truest form, provides a positive development and relatively simple implementation into the UK further and higher education sectors. Deep personalisation benefits from being learner centred thus enabling high levels of creativity. The learners hold responsibility therefore empowering them to show individuality through their work. Educational essentialism allows the positive aspect of holding a strong societal foundation central to the theoretical viewpoint. The theory creates a minimum knowledge gained by all learners therefore embedding them successfully into society, generating a constant core of knowledge gained by all of society. Conversely both theories have issues; entrenching deep personalisation in its truest sense would be problematic due to the DfES maintaining control over assessments therefore reducing the levels of creativity available to the learners. Also future use of qualifications become difficult to measure due to an inadequate success measurement provided due to the individuality of all learners work. Furthermore deep

personalisation can create cultural, intellectual and financial barriers in society, widening the current levels of inequality. The core aspect of the theory has been criticised because it promotes the preservation of past knowledge and transferring that to new learners, which consequently limits societal growth, producing a cultural lag.

Combining both theories in an effective form provides possible development within further and higher education. Educational essentialism states that core knowledge is a necessity; however all subject specialism must have core skills and knowledge that is required. Therefore, proposing that at the beginning of a course aforementioned core skills are learnt in an essentialist form. Moving onwards a personalised approach should be adopted for learners to specialise in specific areas, thus embedding creativity and responsibility for learners to generate motivation. It cannot be considered as deep personalisation due to assessments not being wholly student centred. This framework provides a strong and simple staged process for further and higher education subjects. Although the argument provided holds a strong basis to combine both theoretical perspectives in certain aspects this in not possible. The marketisation of education is one of them, this framework will adopt the deep personalisation approach of education as being a competitive market because it provides development and improvement within the market. However, assessments using this structure will embrace educational essentialism assessment with shallow personalisation, as the current education structure does not allow for deep personalisation.

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