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**Terror vs Soul; the struggle for creativity in primary Initial Teacher Education**

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**Abstract**

Creativity is a commonly used word in education circles, yet it is also seen as something that is being undermined by contemporary agendas of standards, testing and an increasingly strong focus on core subjects that are used as indicators of school performance (Robinson 2011, Alexander, 2010), which are impacting the work of teachers (Clarke, 2013a; Taubman, 2009). This paper starts from Ball's 2006 paper 'The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity' and argues the importance of developing strong senses of identity and agency in student teachers as part of the teacher's 'soul', as a positive response to the pressures, or 'terrors' of a performative, standards based agenda.

Having discussed the background of creativity and performativity, the relationship between identity, agency and creativity is explored through the lenses of three theoretical perspectives; Bourdieu and his idea of habitus; Foucault and his ideas about power, discipline and subjectivity; Lacan and Ruti and perspectives from psycho-analysis, foregrounding the notion of 'lack'. In the discussion of this sequence of perspectives, the argument is for a trajectory in which the view of the human subject becomes less deterministic and more agentic. The paper is framed within a virtues ethic and in applying Nodding's (2003) argument, creativity can be seen not so much as a virtue in itself, but the confident and agentic working out of creativity in practice allows educators to work virtuously within a performative culture and with an 'ethical commitment' to creativity.

**Key words:** Performativity – Identity – Agency – creativity – virtues ethic

**Terror vs Soul; the struggle for creativity in primary Initial Teacher Education**

Creativity is a commonly used word in education circles, yet it is also seen as something that is being squeezed by contemporary agendas of standards, testing and the current national curriculum (Department for Education, 2014) which is generally seen as having taken an anticreative direction (Harris, 2015; Flood, 2016). There is little doubt that education is experiencing increasing pressure to focus on measurable standards (Robinson 2011, Alexander, 2010), which is impacting the work of teachers (Clarke, 2013a; Taubman, 2009), and that wherever there is pressure to conform, there is the potential for individuality, creativity and innovation to be supressed and for the standards culture to harm students (Robinson, 2015).

The title of this paper - Terror vs Soul; the struggle for creativity in Primary Initial Teacher Education – could be seen as very negative. The assumption that quality, excellence and standards can be quantifiable is highly questionable and there is the need to challenge these reductionist and simplistic expressions (Clarke, 2013a). The terrors of performativity (Ball, 2006; Lyotard, 1984) and potential negative impacts on the very core – the soul – of what teachers do and who they are would seem to be very real. However, creative practice can challenge any view that such terrors are either completely deterministic of teacher identity and agency, or are incompatible with creative practice. Whilst the performative culture of primary ITE can be challenged, it is very hard to escape its influence or allow students to escape it either. However, it is possible to work within those circumstances, developing creative identity and agency, at least to some extent on our terms, so that we can work within a performative culture, but without abandoning our

values, beliefs and our own creativity in the face of the pressures to conform to the cultural arbitraries of, in this case, ITE.

This paper argues for the "virtue" of creativity, within a virtue ethic that sees creativity as inherently valuable and worthwhile and certainly not something to be side-lined in schools (NASUWT, 2017), or in ITE. Various perspectives on creativity will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the contemporary performative climate of education; the context in which the "struggle for creativity can be argued to be taking place. This will lead into a discussion of identity and agency and how developing these creates the potential to tackle that struggle for creativity. Drawing on the work of Ball, Clarke, Foucault, Lacan and Ruti, I argue that the struggle for creativity in teacher education can be framed, without hyperbole, as a struggle between the "the teachers' soul" on the one hand and the "terrors of performativity" (Ball, 2003) on the other. Against this background, I then go on to an account of my practice, working with final year primary education student teachers to promote time and space for creative expression on the part of teachers and learners in primary schools. I conclude with a discussion of the potential and actual contradictions that are part and parcel of developing such an approach whilst working in an essentially performative context.

We begin by framing the paper within a virtues ethic.

**A virtues ethic**

Three broad notions of ethics can be identified (Annas, 2009; a utilitarian (or consequential) ethic, a deontological ethic and a virtue ethic. A utilitarian ethic emphasises the consequences or outcomes of actions (Hursthouse, 1999), aims for the best consequences, and therefore justifies any action that achieves the goals (Hursthouse and

Pettigrove, 2016). This can be seen to be the ethic dominant and inherent in much current education policy and practice that seeks to raise narrowly conceived ‘standards’. This can be seen as overly simplistic and reductionist, recognising virtue merely as instrumental to the achievement of some independently defined good (Annas, 2009). A deontological ethic differs from a utilitarian ethic in that some acts are seen to be always wrong, even if the act leads to what may be regarded as a desirable or noble outcome. In deontology, the actions are always judged independently of their outcome. In this respect, a choice is seen as “right” when and because of its conformity with a moral norm (Alexander and Moore, 2016). A virtues ethic, as opposed to a utilitarian or deontological ethic, is an approach which emphasises the virtues, or moral character and is characterised by questions such as ‘what should I be or how should I live?’ (rather than what should I do?); goodness is defined in terms of human excellence (rather than in terms of rightness); practical necessity is seen as a response to values (rather than in response to compliance); there is a focus on character (rather than a focus on action) (Van Hooft, 2006; Athanassoulis, 2013). The traditional focus on the utilitarian and deontological positions assumes that the central concern of ethics is action in isolation from the agents of that action and the more recent attention to virtue ethics provides a “third way”. (Annas, 2009).

Noddings (2003), whilst advocating an ethic of virtue to an extent, takes the discussion of virtue ethics further, favouring the notion of an ‘ethical ideal’. Whilst an ethic of virtue can be a driving factor behind moral behaviour, Nodding’s notion of an ethical ideal, is careful to not let ‘ “virtue” dissipate into “the virtues” described in abstract categories’ (2003; p.80). For example, caring is not seen in itself to be a virtue but the ethical commitment that is needed to maintain oneself as caring leads to actions that both develop and exercise

virtues. As Noddings (2003; p.96) warns ‘we must not reify virtues …if we do this, our ethic turns inwards and is even less useful that an ethic of principles’.

Applying Noddings argument to creativity, the argument in this paper is not that creativity is in itself a virtue, a clearly distinguishable reifiable ‘thing’, but the confident working out of creativity in practice allows teacher educators and student teachers to work virtuously, not to escape the pressures of a performative culture, but to work within them and this ‘ethical commitment’ to creativity ‘leads to the development and exercise of virtues’ (Noddings, 2003; p.96).

We shall return to this virtues ethic argument later in the paper. Now, let us consider the question, what is creativity?

**What is creativity?**

This is a question that I pose to my final year Primary Education student teachers as we embark on a module called *Creativity in Primary Education*. They soon discover that there are many different and competing views of what this word means, which can be simultaneously fascinating and frustrating. Creativity is usually understood to be a noun (Oxford English Dictionary n.d.; Cambridge Dictionary  n.c.) and it is perhaps this categorisation that has led to some perspectives that potentially over-simplify, or at least miss the richness and potential of creativity as a concept. In what follows, I briefly discuss perspectives from the fields of psychology and education.

**Psychological perspectives on creativity**

Psychology is a field rich in writing about creativity. Sawyer (2014) acknowledges that defining creativity is difficult, but identifies two groups of research that aim to do just this.

The first are those that seek an individualistic, cognitive definition by studying a person in their engagement in creative behaviour. Creativity here is defined as “a new mental combination that is expressed in the world’ (Sawyer, 2014, p.7). So, creativity here is not a repetition, it is a combination of two or more thoughts and this combination must be recorded or expressed, thus excluding any ideas that one may have but are never communicated to anyone else. The second group are those that seek a sociocultural definition, studying creative people working together in social and cultural contexts. Sawyer (2014, p.8) argues that for these researchers, creativity is defined as ‘the generation of a product that is judged to be novel and also to be appropriate, useful or valuable by a suitably knowledgeable social group.’ In this sociocultural perspective, the idea of creativity as a *thing* is foregrounded, as a socially valuable product must be generated for the act or person to be regarded as creative. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) puts forward his notion of “flow”; an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focussed state of consciousness that characterises the feelings of people engrossed in challenging, creative activity. However, Csikszentmihalyi also frames creativity within the sociocultural model, discussed above, seeing creativity as occurring when an individual, using the symbols and rules of a domain, has a new idea and this is selected as appropriate for inclusion in the domain, by the gatekeepers of the domain, that is the field. Gardner (2008) describes ‘five minds for the future’, one of which is the “creative mind”,but a somewhat narrow and instrumental perception of what creativity emerges: if an idea is not accepted or accepted too easily, it is not creative, since ‘the only way creativity can be judged is, if over the long run, the creator’s work change how other people think and behave.’ (Gardner, 2008, p.11). What we see here, is creativity being reified, ranked and instrumentalised (Gould, 1981), as well as becoming potentially the domain of the socially and materially advantaged. Creativity as a concept is thereby conceptually diminished as the foregrounding of a socially valuable product and its use as the basis for the judgement of creativity does not

fully recognise the value of such things as imagination and free thinking, unless these produce that socially valuable outcome.

Originality is a common element in perspectives on creativity and can be seen in different ways or at different levels e.g. on an individual level – it is original to the creator. On a relative level – it is original to this group of people. On a historical level – it is truly unique. Originality can also be seen in terms of an inclination to *not* impose preconceptions as facts as they are seen and to learn something new even if this disrupts our comfort and therefore 'a creative state of mind' (Bohm, 1996, p.21) - a constant openness to learning what is new, rather than a tendency to impose or reinforce existing and familiar ideas and structures - is important.

The idea that creativity has the potential to address the ills of society is also a common thread in some psychological perspectives. Creativity can be seen as something more than a product and be much more about expressing our being. May (1975) argues that we express our *being* by creating – creativity is therefore a necessary sequel to being. Therefore, if we do not express our original ideas – our creativity – we betray ourselves and fail to make our own contributions to society. So, we can take the idea of creativity into the realms of individual, institutional and societal well-being and change whilst simultaneously arguing that such a transformative perspective starts from the premise that the creative state of mind is normal not exceptional; that final point is one where different psychological perspectives differ.

**Educational perspectives on creativity**

In the field of education, a report from 1999 that remains influential, is that of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE). In this seminal work, creativity is defined as 'imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value' (NACCCE, 1999, p.29) and four key components are identified;

- Imagination: a fresh perspective that generates alternatives to the routine.
- Purpose: *applied* imagination.
- Originality: seen at three levels.
- Value: imaginative activity in itself is not creative and can only be called creative if its outcome is deemed to be of value in relation to the task at hand.

The fourth point above, again raises the issue of value and begs the questions what do we mean by value and who are those who can deem an outcome to be of value?

Wyse and Dowson (2009 pp.5,) take this further in that outcomes must be judged as valuable by those 'suitably qualified' to make that judgement. In contrast, Fisher and Williams (2004) define creativity as when outcomes are generated that show imagination and originality as well as value but the creative thinker can judge the value of what they have done. Starko (2014) identifies two key elements across a range of definitions of creativity – novelty and appropriateness. For Starko, novelty involves asking the key question 'new to whom?'. Writing in the school classroom context, he states (2014, p.12) that 'to be considered creative, a product or idea must be original or novel to the individual creator.' Craft (2005) and NACCCE (1999) out forward the ideas of 'Big C' and 'Little C' creativity, which is more about scale. Put simply, Big C may be Mozart where creativity is part of and expressed through a "genius" level of talent and the originality may be on the "historical level" (NACCCE, 1999). Little C is much smaller scale and every day e.g. the role play of a nursery child. The point here is while there may be differences in scale,

these are *not* differences in value, which puts this view, common, but not universal in the education field, at odds with more prevalent views from psychology (e.g. Gardner, 2008).

So we can see, even from a brief overview of a small selection of perspectives, that creativity is viewed in different and contrasting ways. However, a common thread running through these ideas, even though they come from different fields, is the notion that creativity as a concept can be objectified as something to be attained and judged. Whilst creativity as a word, *is* technically a noun and therefore an object, I would argue that to view creativity solely on this basis is to miss much of its richness, depth and life-enhancing potential.

Attention now turns to the contemporary performative climate of education, in which it can be argued the "struggle" for creativity takes place.

## The contemporary performative climate of education

### Terror vs Soul

Recent policy changes in education have seen two contradictory thrusts – deregularisation and centralisation. Deregularisation can be seen in such policy changes as local management of Schools and the growth of academies and free schools. Centralisation, which is in essence about control, can be seen in in such things as central control of curricula, specification of standards and much closer monitoring of schools. What runs through both and indeed ties them together, is competition between education systems and educational institutions e.g. international league tables (OECD) and national school league tables.

The increasingly performative climate of education is potentially at odds with any desire to promote creative approaches to teaching and learning and to facilitate creative expressions for pupils, students and teachers. In his article "*The Teachers' Soul and the Terrors of Performativity*", Stephen Ball refers to an 'epidemic of reforms' and calls the scope and complexity of reforms 'breath-taking' (2003, p.145). Schools have seen a shift towards the 'logic of performativity' (Flint and Peim, 2012, p.155) and since the 1988 Education reform Act, successive reforms have been driven by an agenda of marketisation, competition and accountability (Clarke, 2013a) and this has shown no signs of slowing down. Performativity is at once a technology, a culture, and a mode of regulation, that uses judgements and comparison based on set criteria as a means of incentive, control and change (Ball, 2003).

The assumption underpinning the culture of performativity is that quality, excellence and standards can be quantified and this quantification then becomes the target of official focus. Newman (2007) argues (albeit not talking about education as such) that this ideology is so entrenched that we no longer recognise it as an ideology as such. Performativity therefore, has the capacity to shape both what we do but also who we are (e.g. as teachers) and further, the capacity to reshape in its own image the organisations or individuals that are being monitored (Ball, 2003, 2013). The culture of competition can be seen as so entrenched in education that is can be largely unquestioned; we accept it without even realising its influence on what we do and it therefore remains unchallenged, growing in its power to shape what we do and who we are and operating irrespective of the level of autonomy or centralisation under which an educational institution works.

In this sense, performativity can be a culture of ‘terror’ (Lyotard, 1984; Ball, 2003, 2013); a threat to remove an individual or institution from participation in a competitive field as a consequence of inadequate performance in relation to the criteria that set out the standards and measures of quality in that field. Teachers are thus ‘constituted as both experts and subservient, as professional and compliant’ (Honan, 2015, p. 216).

If we make connections between these ideas of terror and soul and creativity, we can see how, in the face of the “terror” of a standards based performative agenda, the need to exercise our creative capacities and creative practice is both vital and virtuous in challenging both the logic of performativity (terror) and in facilitating and developing the life enhancing capacities of creative expression for individuals, groups, institutions and society (soul) in pursuit of a more authentic, engaging and empowering vision of education (Biesta, 2009).

I now wish to argue that one way to do this is to develop our sense of creative identity and agency.

**Creative identity and agency**

For the purpose of this discussion, identity can be seen as the way in which we view ourselves, personally and professionally and agency as the ability to live out that self-view in our lives. As the argument builds to incorporate identity, agency and creativity, so the expressions “creative identity” and “creative agency” will be used; creativity is then seen as one expression of that agency. The way we see ourselves – our identity - may be subject to many influences such as upbringing, membership of social, political, religious and

professional groups, working contexts and life experiences. The way we live out this identity – our agency – is likely to depend on such things as the strength of that sense of identity and the circumstances in which we live and work; how and the extent to which they may facilitate or hinder the living out of our identity. Creativity – purposeful, original and imaginative thinking and activity that challenges preconceived ideas and practices – can be seen as a key part of identity and agency, as that creative state of mind discussed earlier, is part of a strong identity and sense of agency that can resist and challenge ideas and practices that have become established and unquestioned. This section will explore the relationship between identity, agency and creativity through the lenses of three theoretical perspectives;

- Bourdieu and his idea of habitus;
- Foucault and his ideas about power, discipline and subjectivity;
- Lacan and Ruti and perspectives from psycho-analysis foregrounding the notion of 'lack'.

In my reading of this sequence of perspectives, I argue for a trajectory in which the view of the human subject become less deterministic and more agentic.

**Bourdieu and habitus**

Bourdieu's idea of habitus is particularly pertinent in this context. Bourdieu uses the term to refer to the deeply rooted assumptions, not explicitly reflected upon but held almost subconsciously, which we all inherit (Green 2013; Jarvis 2009; Alheit, 2009). These assumptions regulate both our individual and collective practices and therefore the habitus influences practice to a greater or lesser extent. The formation of a habitus occurs through the establishment of dispositions - things from the past which survive in the present and also perpetuate themselves into the future (Bourdieu 1977). The habitus is then internalised and 'generates meaningful practices and meaning giving perceptions'

(Bourdieu 1984, p.166). The habitus, then, is a system of practices that are classified as "belonging" but is also the system by which the practices are classified; an internal logic or self-justification serves to be self-perpetuating and habitus becomes natural, unchallenged and normal for those within it and whose interests it serves. The habitus could therefore be characterised as "this is what we do" and the practices could be characterised as "we do what we do because this is what we do and this is what we have always done"; or in the context of a performative culture "we do what we do because this is what we do and we do it because this is what we have to do."

To put this into the context of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in England, student teachers, in order to be awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) currently have to meet the requirements of the 2012 Teachers Standards (DfE, 2012). This can be understood in terms of Bourdieu's (1986) discussion of forms of capital; economic, cultural and social. To undertake a course leading to QTS requires fees to be paid - economic capital. This can be converted into the institutionalised form of cultural capital that is a degree qualification with QTS. This in turn opens up professional employment opportunities and therefore a conversion back to economic capital as well as the social capital of such things as professional connections and networks as part of the 'body' of qualified teachers. So, in order for the forms of capital to be exchanged, conformity to and reproduction/perpetuation of a 'cultural arbitrary' (Bourdieu, 1990) e.g. Teachers' Standards, is required.

So, whilst ITE departments do not produce the cultural arbitrary of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012), they have become so much a part of its 'essential function of inculcation' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.54) that the cultural arbitrary is constantly reproduced; the

Teachers' Standards act as both powerful drivers of practice and the criteria for the judgements, targets and surveillance of performativity.

So, the idea of habitus is a potentially a powerful driver of identity (Elliot and Lemert, 2014; Jones, Bradbury and LeBontillier, 2013) especially where individual or groups fail to challenge the norms of belief and practice of the habitus. However, the idea of habitus, whilst clearly useful in identifying how practices and identities are reproduced over time, can also be seen as rather deterministic and, potentially pessimistic in terms of offering limited scope for developing one's sense of identity and agency in more creative ways. By contrast, in the work of Foucault there is a greater consideration of self-formation and the development of identity and agency, where the scope for and importance of challenging the influence of established ideas and practise in our lives is foregrounded.

**Foucault: discipline, power, subjectivity and care of the self**

In "Discipline and Punish", Foucault , develops the idea whereby discipline, rather than punishment effects the 'means of correct training' (1977, p.172) in society.It does this in three ways. The first is what Foucault terms hierarchical observations, which are controlling practices, as those being observed internalise the expectations needed for a satisfactory outcome of the observations. The second element is the use of normalising judgements, which bring with them the notion of non-conforming. These normalising judgments are used to rank, grade, reward and punish people within a group and conformity to the imposed normality indicates membership of that social group; a clear influence on a person's sense of identity and agency. The third element of 'correct training' is the examination, which combines both. Foucault describes the examination as 'a normalising gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish' (1977, p.184). In this formulation, there is a shift from a traditional view and exercise of

power which was highly visible, often violent and typically punitive. The notion of visibility is developed through Foucault's development of the idea of panopticism (Foucault, 1997, 1980), drawing on Bentham's panopticon, a prison design consisting of circular building, the outer ring, with a central, internal tower with windows facing onto the inside of the ring. The outer ring is divided into cells with windows into the centre and onto the outside of the building. In the outer ring, people are totally seen without ever seeing while in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen. This is seen, in whatever context one may wish to put it as one that produces significant effects of power. That power is seen as a form of discipline but also one that can be used for the imposition of particular forms of behaviour.

Foucault's work on disciple may be seen as nihilist and deterministic (McNay, 1994) but, if there are such powerful internal and external forces at work to regulate and normalise our thoughts and practices, how can we develop a strong sense of identity and agency that can challenge these forces? Foucault's later works are seen as an attempt to overcome some of this determinism, allowing power to be seen as less stable and less influential, opening up possibilities of stronger self-formation (Mills, 2003, McNay 1994). Clarke argues that a focus on teacher identity 'provides space for agency and individuality' (2013b, p.165; see also 2009) not offered by a focus based largely on performative metrics. Whereas a standards-based perspective is reductionist and over simplifies complexities into lists of required competencies and characteristics ('Teachers must…'; 'Teachers are expected to …' DfE 2012), there are genuine possibilities for change, which can be seen as a form of Foucault's 'care of the self' (Clarke, 2009, 2013a). 'Care of the self' is about practices that aim for self-improvement in relation to an ethical way of life and the 'winning' of an ethos is seen as an exit from that which is produced by a focus on

surveillance (Vintges, 2014). Foucault sees freedom as being brought about by speaking the truth; this may require significant courage but is nonetheless vital to sustaining one's integrity. Hence, fearless speech and the care of the self go hand in hand (Mendieta, 2014). Put into the context of our contemporary neoliberal dominated education system, it can be argued that there is a need to critique our own practices, thereby changing the understanding of what it means to be a teacher that has been created or at least influenced by the dominant discourse in education. This involves 'constant and organised work on the self' (Ball and Olmedo, 2012) and in this regard, McGushin (2014, p.129) defines Foucault's 'care of the self' as 'what we do when we set out to do the hard work of forging a relationship to ourselves.'

Subjectivity is therefore seen as dynamic and active; if we lose sight of this activity, we will tend to accept a fixed idea of who and what we are. Foucault identifies two forms of subjectivity – disciplinary and hermeneutic. Disciplinary subjectivity is one which regulates, monitors and measure behaviour leading to a normalisation of thinking and activity but is one that raise capacities and so *appears* to be a positive force. Hermeneutic subjectivity, on the other hand, involves looking within for the true self that has not been moulded and made to conform – a subjectivity of self-expression. However, Foucault rejects both as they miss the relational activity that make us the kind of person that we are and proposes an alternative way of thinking about ourselves; subjectivity is not something that we are, but is an activity that we do (McGushin, 2014). For Foucault, subjectivity is an active *becoming* rather than a fixed being and if we ignore this, then disciplinary training and normalisation take over. If we do not engage in this active becoming, there is the risk of 'ontological insecurity' (Ball, 2003, p.148); are we doing enough, the right things, doing as much or as well as others? There is an additional uncertainty; are we doing what we do because it is worthwhile or because it will be measure, judged, compared? The insecurity

is compounded if the stage is reached when we cannot recognise our ability and our achievements in the face of indicators that suggest otherwise. Performance indicators provide the basis for measurement and comparison and, hence, can give feelings of pride, success, failure, guilt, shame etc. They simultaneously have emotional status *and* the appearance of rationality and objectivity; the terrors of performativity lie in *not* conforming to the apparent rationality and falling short of those imposed standards, measures and targets.

Foucault's work on subjectivity and care of the self, offer more optimistic and open possibilities for us to create identity and agency than do the more deterministic ideas about power and discipline and those of Bourdieu and habitus. But Foucault's work, to an extent, remains focussed on the presence of power and the disciplinary operations of power/knowledge (Scheurich & Mackenzie, 2005) where power is seen not just in terms of judging quality, but also as an assessment of conformity to norms and contributing to the processes of normalisation. To develop the notion of subjectivity further in the direction of agency and creativity, I thus turn to the work of Ruti and Lacan.

**Ruti and Lacan; subjectivity, lack and the art of living.**

Ruti (2009) looks at subjectivity from a psychoanalytical viewpoint which, despite seeing our 'humanness' as socially constructed, might not seem the most obvious source if we are searching for a positive reading of creativity. Ruti (p.5) links creativity to 'agency', defining agencay as:

> How much creative freedom we have with respect to our lives, to what extent we can be the authors of our own meanings and how (if at all) we might be able to escape the dominant sociocultural structures that surround us.

In this respect, she argues that the construction of subjectivity takes place within a social context within which we are ‘neither fully agentic nor entirely disempowered’ (p.5). Our context limits what we can envision or attain but we can contribute to the production of meaning where it means something to us personally. The argument is, that as we have a self, we can influence our destinies. We can respond to the external influences in our lives and whilst these influences can impose limits on what we do, as we exercise any creative freedoms that we do have, we can potentially escape the influence of dominant cultures, practices and beliefs within our contexts. This interaction with our destinies, this authoring of our own meaning through the use of our creative freedoms, is our agency. The self’s constructed state enhances rather than diminishes its creative potential because we form ourselves in response to the many and varied external influences in our lives. So, a perspective develops that sees greater potential for agentic living, one that has greater potential for the escape from dominant beliefs and practices in which we live. This view then is not about dominating circumstances or allowing circumstances to dominate us but is about living with and within them in a way that has meaning for us. This view, Ruti claims, helps us to understand the ‘art of living’ (2009, p.7).

In the context of the ‘art of living’, Ruti discusses the concept of ‘lack’ – a largely ontological sense of something missing that lies within us as humans. Yet this gap, far from being totally disempowering, can engender the ability to engage in the process of becoming a person. The gap, the uncertainty and sense of yearning caused by lack, makes us look outwards to compensate; in other words, because we lack we have desire and are prompted to create to fill our lack. This is more than just turning negatives into positives; the attempt to fill the gap leads to creative endeavours and so lack is the underpinning of all creativity in our lives. Or as Ruti puts it, lack is the empty slot that

allows for movement in the puzzle of life (2006, p. 13). Ruti (2012) argues that it is because we feel lack that we also feel compelled to create and through that creativity we find ways to compensate for our lack.

As almost the opposite of ‘lack’, Ruti refers to Lacan’s concept of the ‘Thing’; ‘the primordial object that promises immediate enjoyment’ (2009,p.95). The Thing however can never be attained so we are driven to look for things in its place and so we try to shape meaning around what is essentially a void. So, we attain creative agency as we constantly act to fill the void and thus engage in ‘the continuous process of being human’ (Ruti, 2009, p.96). Thus an inextricable link between lack and creativity emerges; it is in the lack that we possess creative capacity and it is through our creative endeavours that we deal with our sense of lack. If we were perfectly content and if nothing were missing or felt to be missing from our lives, we would have no drive to enter into any creative endeavours or the ‘cycles of invention and re-invention that characterise human existence’ (Ruti, 2012 p.52).

Ruti also sees creativity in terms of surrender; a surrender to the challenges and even disintegration of our normal ways of thinking and doing things, that can arise when we explore or confront new possibilities. For example, a teacher may adopt a different form of assessment that allows students more freedom in how they demonstrate the meeting of a set of learning outcomes. This may require the “surrender” of long held ways of thinking and working that keep the control with the teacher. This disintegration can be seen as a precondition of creativity. We need to surrender habitual structures in our thinking to allow non-habitual creativity to emerge; ‘it is only by relinquishing the expected that the unexpected can be discovered’ (Ruti, 2009, p.137).

So, creativity involves a negotiation between lack and the attempts to fill lack and this ongoing negotiation that creativity both entails and encapsulates, is what it means for Ruti, to enter into the 'art of living'.

Fromm ("*To have or to be*", 1976) may at first sight seem somewhat unrelated, but there is resonance with Ruti's ideas here. He argues that our normative culture in the Western world is one where the ultimate goal is "to have" and to have, more; therein lies the value assigned to individuals and organisations; if one has nothing, one is nothing. In contrast, the 'being mode' is seen as being founded on independence, freedom and critical reason. The being mode requires a letting go of the having mode. This brings difficulties because our normative values tell us that "to have" is necessary and good, and therefore "to be" is a place of anxiety. So, the premise is that we need a fundamental shift from the dominant having mode, to a being mode in order to save our society from psychological and economic catastrophe. Fromm would argue that we can do this, if we are suffering and are aware that we are (*c.f. the notion of 'lack'*), if we can recognise the source and origins of that suffering and if we recognise that we can overcome our problems (*c.f. the art of living; care of the self).*

To do so we need to change our habitual life practices and consider new possibilities So, authentic creativity in the widest sense of promoting social good, lies in the way we respond to the tensions and limits of our lives and situations, just as Ruti sees creativity as arising from our sense of "lack" and in response to the circumstances of our lives.

If we return to the pressures of neoliberalism in education policy and the terrors of performativity in schools and ITE, it is all too easy for creative expression in teaching and learning to be side-lined in favour of what may be seen as more pressing agendas. However, if we recognise those pressures and also have the strong sense of creative identity and agency, then, in the midst of a performative culture, creativity can flourish in schools, in ITE and in society as a whole.

In the final section, the discussion returns to a perspective of virtue ethics and the virtues around the practice of creativity, exemplified by an example from my own practice.

**Virtue ethics and the virtues of creative practice**

As discussed earlier, in applying Nodding's (2003) argument, creativity can be seen not so much as a virtue in itself , but the confident and agentic working out of creativity in practice allows educators to work virtuously, within a performative culture and with an 'ethical commitment' to creativity that leads to the development and exercise of virtues.

A virtue ethic sees virtues (in this case, those developed through the commitemnt to creative practice) as inherently ethical, valuable and worthwhile, placing it in stark contrast to the instrumental focus of neoliberal eductaion policy that would value and demand outcomes, and a deontological focus that would lead us to act based more on compliance . To illustate this an account of my practice in primary ITE, working with final year Primary education student teachers, will now be discussed, which seeks to enact an initial teacher education that focuses on developing a deeper sense of creative identity and agency as the basis for creative practice. This part of my practice lies in a final year module on our Primary Education (QTS) course called Creativity in Primary Education. Its focus is on exploring and critiquing established views about creativity from different fields,

encouraging student teachers to develop their own “active definitions” of creativity and to explore how these may be worked out in their professional classroom practice. The phrase “active definitions” has been coined to represent the way in which these individual definitions may change over time, in response to critical analysis and reflection, as well as their active nature as students are encouraged to live out these developing views in their school placements. The aim is to go beyond what may be seen as superficial and limited perspectives on and practices of creativity in education. Students are challenged in their thinking about creativity - what it is, what creative practice may look like, how it may affect their professional practice, how we may maximise creative opportunities for on teaching and learning – all the time refining their active definitions and reflecting on how these may work out in their practice. As we do this, I practice in a way that I see as creative, explaining how my active definition is working out and inviting their reflections and judgements on my ideas and practice. This opening up for reflection is, I believe, a representation of one of the virtues of this practice; it is *never* about impositions of my views but is a dialogic exploration of many perspectives, both complementary and contrary, on a journey of (co)construction of new ideas. In exploring creativity, we are being creative in constructing something new, in turn building creative agency for the students and for me.

As discussed earlier, the concept of the ‘art of living’, views agency as an ability to live within our actual circumstances in a way that allows us to make the most of those circumstances in a way that has meaning for us. It would be naïve of me to lead a module on a QTS course that ignores the performative agenda of schools as that is the climate for which our students are preparing. It would be wrong of me, I believe, to tell them just to go into school and do whatever “creative” thing pops into their heads and have fun! That would be very likely to lead to their *not* achieving QTS. My practice is, sadly full of

tensions and contradictions; the dominance of the performative agenda in ITE driven by Teachers' Standards and the institutional gradings of Ofsted; the 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1991; Elliot and Lemert, 2014) that is potentially exercised over students based on the extent to which they internalise and conform to the cultural arbitrary of the Teachers' Standards; the encouragement of creative practice, risk taking, adventure, breaking habitual practices etc. in student teachers, whilst judgement are made about their professional practice. Overall, tensions lie in the worry that many of the things that concern me in the contemporary performative climate of education, I am also a part of, as I apply the logic of performativity to my students at the same time as I encourage their "active definitions" of creativity. In practical terms it would be very difficult to change the performative culture of primary education and ITE. It is impossible in the current climate for example, to ignore the requirements for student teachers to conform to the Teachers' Standards in order for QTS to be awarded nor the expectations and requirements of Ofsted inspections of ITE. But Ruti (2009) sees agency as an ability to live within our actual circumstances (rather than transcend them) in a way that allows us to make the most of those circumstances. It is possible to work within the circumstances that we have. I have a sense of identity that does come partly from the 'habitus' (Bourdieu) of primary education and higher education/ITE, partly from the power and discipline relationships (Foucault) that arise from the accountabilities of a performative agenda, but I also have a strong identity that comes from developing my own active definitions of creativity. I am 'neither fully agentic nor entirely disempowered' (Ruti, 2009, p.5) but as I take my creative identity and develop it in practice, working within my circumstances, constraints and freedoms, I develop and work out my creative agency, not to dominate those things that I dislike, but to work within them in a way that has meaning for me - the art of living.

The original title of this paper used the word “battle” rather than “struggle”; the virtue of creative practice is to actually *not* approach this as a battle. Yes, there are clearly tensions in practice between performativity and creativity but it should not be seen as a binary choice. It is so hard now to see any way to escape the dominance of the standards agenda, but creativity should not be seen as the antithesis of that, or as something separate and compartmentalised, or to be done when the real work has been covered. Creative teaching and learning should be seen as a good way to achieve the very standards that we cannot escape. The whole point of the practice of developing active definitions of creativity is to help student teachers to develop *their* critically evolved view of what true creativity is, and then to work it out in their professional practice. In doing so, they begin to develop a stronger sense of creative identity which puts them in a better position to exercise creative agency in their classes, providing creative teaching, learning and expression for themselves and their pupils. In the midst of a range of performative pressures, this identity and agency empowers them to approach their professional practice creatively and to find the ‘art of living’, within an ethical commitment to develop and exercise virtues (Noddings, 2003).

**Conclusion**

As long as education policy remains focused primarily on quantifiable measures of standards and quality, approaching education creatively will be challenging. If we can forefront that strong sense of creative identity and agency rather than putting these performative measures at the forefront, then we can practice creativity as a genuine virtue rather than one side in a struggle. The 2014 National Curriculum came under much criticism in the education press (e.g. Harris, 2016, Flood, 2015) for stifling children’s creativity. Yes, such things specify what we teach and standards we must achieve, but

they rarely specify *how* that is to be done. That is where the true virtue of creativity in education lies; in challenging narrow beliefs and practices that purport to act in the pursuit of quality and standards and instead developing strong senses of creative identity and agency that allows us to develop fully our creative expression in teaching and learning, working within constraints but using the freedoms that we *do* have but often ignore. It is only though these strong senses of identity and agency that we operate in Fromm's "being" mode and not just the "having" mode and have the professional confidence to practice creatively in the face of the terrors of performativity; not to thwart them but to turn them from terrors to just part of the professional context, but not one that crushes our souls as teachers. We need to work forwards to something new; a teaching profession where strong senses of creative identity and agency can help student teachers and NQTs to begin, survive and thrive in their careers in a way that allows them to be true to themselves in the challenging performative culture of primary ITE and primary education. If there is a virtue of creativity in such an approach, it is to facilitate, encourage and develop a new generation of teachers, empowered with the professional confidence to live out their active definitions and expressions of creativity, approaching teaching and learning creatively to help children achieve everything of which they are capable in all areas of their young lives.

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