Social Class - Pedagogy, Curriculum and Inter-Disciplinary Learning.
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Thus in a society in which the obtaining of social privileges depends more and more closely on possession of academic credentials, the school does not only have the function of ensuring discreet succession to a bourgeois estate which can no longer be transmitted directly and openly.

This privileged instrument of the bourgeois sociodicy which confers on the privileged the supreme privilege of not seeing themselves as privileged manages the more easily to convince the disinherited that they owe their scholastic and social destiny to their lack of gifts or merits, because in matters of culture absolute dispossession excludes awareness of being dispossessed.

Bourdieu & Passeron (1977, p210)
Bourdieu (1996) explains, education is used by families in a strategic fashion to reproduce and indeed advance their position in social space.

We might think of this as the privileged using education to reinforce their privileged.

Social class is present in policy, curriculum and pedagogical practice.

Recall that Freire (2014) notes that ‘...though we are programmed we are nevertheless not determined.’
Although, not all are interested in tackling these inequalities.

In a paper from 1982 Connell et al quote from an Australian department of education internal document;

‘........full-blown reproduction approach arguments the cause (of educational inequality) is, if anything, the structure of the social system as a whole; and it is difficult to see any cure apart from a general social revolution - which, by and large, is not departmental policy.’

PART I

Pedagogy & Curriculum
Pedagogy & Curriculum

Rist’s study from 1970 asked the question ‘Given the treatment of low-income children from the beginning of their kindergarten experience, for what class strata are they being prepared other than that of the lower class?’

There does, however, need to be a complete rejection of this social fatalism (Merton, 1948), despite the self-fulfilling prophecy of the practice of some schools and teachers.

Universities, too, must be careful that their pedagogical practice is socially inclusive and that staff do not become the ‘Old, learned, respectable bald heads’ of W.B. Yeats (2016).

Academic staff must avoid the drive to become gated intellectuals, as Giroux (2014, p89) notes, they become ‘walled off from growing impoverished populations….cut loose from any ethical mooring or sense of social responsibility.’
The risk is the formation of a gated pedagogy, one that ‘establishes boundaries to protect the rich, isolates citizens from each other, excludes those populations considered disposable and renders invisible young people, especially poor youth of colour, along with others marginalised by class and race.’ (ibid).

Paulo Freire (1970, p71) considered the teacher-student relationship and how it is essentially narrative in character; ‘This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. Education is suffering from narration sickness.’

Bourdieu & Passeron (1977, p18) reminds us that ‘pedagogic action is objectively a symbolic violence to the extent to which it is an imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power.’
One implication stands out above all: That schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context; and that this very lack of independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighborhood, and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. For equality of educational opportunity through the schools must imply a strong effect of schools that is independent of the child's immediate social environment, and that strong independent effect is not present in American Schools. (p. 325)
In his book On Critical Pedagogy Henry Giroux notes;

‘…….there is a need to mobilize the imagination and develop a language of possibility in which any attempt to foreclose on hope could be effectively challenged.’

‘….it becomes possible to imagine power working in the interest of justice, equality and freedom.’

‘….classrooms too often function as modes of social, political and cultural reproduction, particularly when the goals of education are defined through the promise of economic growth…..’
‘The history, social divisions and the many competing interests and value systems found in modern society are expressed in the school curriculum as much as they are in its system of government or its occupational structure. Likewise, curriculum debates, implicitly or explicitly, are always debates about alternative views of society and its future.’

In Whitty’s book from 1985 (p18), he quotes observations from Vulliamy (1976, p25-6);

‘…..the head of music's view that a pupil in the lower stream, would have neither the ability nor the perseverance to play an instrument..........such observations, together with an examination of the literature on music education, tend to support the view that music educators with what I have called the ‘traditional’ paradigm of music teaching make the false assumption that only a limited number of people are ‘musical’.
It is the way and the content of music education that contributed to this false assumption.

Whitty goes on to say;

‘…..features of music education…….were more likely to make sense or seem relevant to the children of professional and managerial workers, rather than to those of the manual working class.’

Indeed Jevons (1975) discussed science education and suggested that ‘a dogmatic element in teaching physical science…….was an epistemological necessity.’

Much like our lack of musicality is this why so many feel they are unscientific?
Discussion

What are the class related assumptions that you make in your teaching, or that you have observed in other teaching practices?

What are the class related assumptions that are imbedded in the content of what you teach?
PART II

Inter-Disciplinary Learning
Discussion

Describe how the pot of jam below might be at the heart of a piece of interdisciplinary learning.
Inter-Disciplinary Learning

The curriculum should include space for learning beyond subject boundaries, so that children and young people can make connections between different areas of learning. Interdisciplinary studies, based upon groupings of experiences and outcomes from within and across curriculum areas, can provide relevant, challenging and enjoyable learning experiences and stimulating contexts to meet the varied needs of children and young people.
Inter-Disciplinary Learning

Theoretically, interdisciplinary learning is anchored in a constructivist paradigm which;

‘... is the view that knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social contest’ (Crotty, 1998: 42).

Interdisciplinary learning breaks with traditions of learning as memorising facts and instead emphasises higher order epistemologies and students’ engagement with complex and unstructured knowledge domains (Ivanitskaya et al., 2002).
Inter-Disciplinary Learning

But some are worried about the loss of their subject integrity.

Roucher et al (1995) note that

‘The 1992 joint statement of the Ad Hoc Consortium of National Arts Education Associations warns against the practice in some schools of reducing the time devoted to instruction in the arts on the grounds that arts instruction is being "integrated" into instruction in other disciplines.’
The authors continue;

‘The statement says that the arts can provide a powerful means to enhance other instructional activities and should be so utilised when appropriate. The arts must maintain their integrity in the curriculum and be taught for their own sake, rather than sewing exclusively as aides to instruction in other disciplines.’
Inter-Disciplinary Learning

Interdisciplinary education is often lauded, sometimes required, but seldom accomplished in practice (Satin, 1985).

Satin (1987) outlines five essential factors for IDL;

(1) interdisciplinary education must be a primary program goal consistent with other major goals;
(2) Controlling educational authorities must be committed to it;
(3) it may have to exist outside the main academic structure because of its inherent conflict with that structure;
(4) honesty, trust, and respect are essential to the interdisciplinary endeavour;
(5) resources must be sufficient for interdisciplinary as well as traditional education.
PART III

Policy vs Practice
Despite discussions around the socially just reasons for widening participation, there appears to be a consistent parallel narrative that accompanies the fulfilment of equitable access and participation (Speirs, 2019).

The Commission on Widening Access in Scotland begin their final report (2016);

‘Fundamentally, access is an issue of fairness’

Within the same sentence however it notes that Scotland has an

‘economic duty to tackle this inequality’ (ibid, p3).

The report then quickly re-emphasises that there is an ‘economic imperative’ to this work.

The shift to the knowledge based economy is emphasised and human capital theory employed in noting ‘the key economic asset of any nation is the talent and skills of its people’ (ibid, p3)

The report warns of the dangers of ‘missing out on the economic potential of some of our finest talents’ (ibid, p3).
Policy

The recent 15-24 Learner Journey Review (Scottish Government, 2018) also employs a neoliberal vocabulary and appears to very quickly elevate value and economic growth over the absolute notion of fairness and equality.

In the opening executive summary they say;

The Scottish Government’s ambition is for a world class education and skills system. A system that delivers the best value to the learner, wider society and the economy where all learners are on the right route to the right job, through the right course via the right information.

To achieve this, and reinforcing our ambitions for inclusive economic growth, social justice, and equity and excellence in education, we need to make sure that every individual young person in Scotland can fulfil his or her potential.
This drift from widening participation and diversity being seen through a social justice rational to one of economics, leads us to the point of diversity as ‘a barometer of societal inequalities’ versus diversity as ‘good economic/business sense’ (Archer, 2007).

This tension arises from an imbalance of legitimacy, ‘resulting in the privileging of the economic.’ (ibid).

Archer rightly concludes that the economic framing of diversity and widening participation involves a ‘reification of diversity that is untenable within a social justice agenda.’
Policy

This is an example of the shadowy presence of neo-liberal political policies and structures.

Education, like everything else can be bought and sold, it is now commodified and can be traded on the market floor.

What need to recall what education is really for, as Freire reminds us - the relationship between liberation and education.

We need to facilitate the development of autonomous learners not the ‘cheerful robots’ Giroux refers to.

Can we dismantle the hierarchy of subjects?
Policy

Bell (1997) addresses this neoliberal approach and the related performativity;

‘Much of the paraphernalia of quality is borrowed from the private sector – the public sector it was argued would benefit from exposure to market forces, commercial models of management and of quality improvement. The disciplines and effects of the market are rooted in a social psychology of ‘self-interest, that great engine of material progress, [that] teaches us to respect results, not principles’ (Newman, 1984, p. 158).
Discussion

What stops us doing what we know is right?

Or

Why do we meet the target but often miss the point?
A Final Note…..

Marx noted that —“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it” (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 145)

‘not a rejection of rational dialogue, discourse, or discussion, nor is it a call for blind activism’ (West, C., The ethical dimensions of Marxist thought, p. 68).

We might think of praxis, ‘reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it’ (Freire, 1970, p. 36).

We might think about our role in this transformation.

We might think about how curricula aimed at empowering young children and developing their capacities to resist interpersonal bias and promote equality have been finding wider audiences (Derman-Sparks, 1989; Schniedewind & Davidson, 1998)

We might think about the organic literacies of the working class, and how they are being harnessed to contest the deforming messages of the dominant school culture (Cushman, 1998; Finn, 1999).

We might reflect and act on our pedagogical practice and the curriculum we teach with compassion and hope.
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