To Teach or Not to Teach? The Dilemma of a Left-wing Student

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I have always wanted to teach. And I have always wanted to change the world. As a child, I was convinced that as Prime Minister I would one day make the world a fair place. I did not understand why on earth it wasn't already, and spent a great deal of my childhood asking why "they" (whoever they may be) were "allowed" to do "that", and receiving no sufficient answer. My sister insists that my first word was "injustice", and my mother refers often to Sunday lunches when I would get on my 'soap box' and have a rant about the state of the world. As I have matured, things have only got worse. I recall with interest the introduction of the national curriculum and the comments of despair from my teacher, about the restrictions it would place on her, when I was only seven. So why do I want to teach? I have no idea! Perhaps I am just deluding myself that I can make a difference. My father believes firmly that I am going through a 'phase' – an idealistic university student influenced by her 'loopy left' tutors. But if that's the case, why am I usually the only voice amongst my peers singing this tune? I am alone – as I will be in my classroom, and I want to make a difference. I want the children I teach to think for themselves, to understand the nature of rational and critical thinking and to reach their conclusions about the world in this way. I cannot simply stand back and look on whilst they are mere pawns in the capitalist machine, being allocated their roles for their futures. I want to inspire them to continue the fight – I want them to believe that there is something to fight for, that there is an alternative.[1] I am regularly frustrated by the laid back attitude of my peers, who inform me as if I am stupid that this is the way the world works and to stop being a dreamer. What hope do we have for social change if these are the attitudes of teachers in our classrooms?

This article will explore the nature of the teacher/pupil relationship in school and the oppression inherent therein. It will offer some explanations as to the causes of such problems and attempt to show how left-wing teacher's can avoid discrimination in their classrooms. It will discuss the issues such student teachers may have with the system, and attempt to inspire them to be 'educators for social change' within their own classrooms.

Chapter eight of Cedric Cullingford's book: *The best years of their lives?* (2002), examines the relationships between pupils and teachers experienced in the secondary school setting today. Although my desire is to teach lower primary age children, his findings are still relevant to my teaching, as the relationship formed between a child and their first teacher will influence their attitude towards education in the future. By looking at issues such as: (amongst others) the role of teachers, the dominance of being taught, and fairness and unfairness in school, he brings to light, and attempts to provide some of the reasons behind, the difficulties faced in school.

Cullingford claims that, for a number of reasons, "there is an underlying relationship with the role of teachers that is negative, dispiriting and disappointing" (2002, p.118). He says that pupils view teachers as imposers of outside will, suppliers of information for future testing and that their will and expectation "is something that essentially remains hidden from them in its purpose, and part of the power of authority" (*ibid*). The difficulty faced by children in differentiating between the role and personality of their teachers is also apparent (2002, pp.118-122).

I was disappointed, and yet unfortunately not surprised to discover in a letter from my nephew that at the tender age of eight his autonomy and desire for learning are being so successfully repressed:

"To Auntie Alle
At school today I finished my Numeracy work early. We *had to* do symmetry on shapes. After playtime in Literacy we *had to* write about how people were rescued from a flood and had to go to a place were it was safe to stay until the flood died down.
Later after Dinner time it was the time *we were supposed to be* reading I was reading the Lion King I didn't finish it all I got up to where Timone and Pumba come in. Then we *had to* pack away for Science. In Science, we *had to* do about light. We had a picture and we *had to* write down all the things that give light. In P.E. *we did* some skipping I spent the skipping time finding a skipping rope that was the right length. Next we were doing hula-hooping we *had to* spin a hula-hoop round our waste [sic] I was one of the best in the class
Love from Daniel" (my emphases)

In 9 sentences, this 'year three' child has repeated 6 times, "we had to"; once, "we were supposed to"; and only once, "we did". This suggests to me that he is well on the way to completing the lesson of capitalist education (in the sense of schooling) – that is, do not expect to do what you want. This is the way it is – you have to do as you are told. When not at school, he wants to learn, so it must be the school environment that is stifling him – and I want to be a teacher? Do I really? Can I really allow myself to support the

system I abhor, to propagate the myth of equality and fairness within my classroom when clearly there is none? Or can I make my classroom equal and fair? Can I really be an agent for social change? Is it possible to believe in Education for Social Change and yet be restricted by the increasingly marketised business-like way of educating our young, and the commodification of the human condition (see Rikowski, 2004)?

Cullingford offers some useful explanations of the causes of such problems in school. Starting with a top-down approach, he blames government interference and the constraints of the National Curriculum in particular – what he refers to as "the changing emphasis on their [teachers'] role as 'delivering' someone else's curriculum" (2002, p.119). He cites Butroyd (2001) as saying that teachers are torn between job demands and complex relationships with students (p.120). Because of these impositions on the role of the teacher, children feel unable to ask for help and that teachers 'can't be bothered' (p.122 and p.128).

Continuing with a macro-sociological approach and on the extreme end of the scale, Anarchist thought holds that the present system of schooling is the problem because of the "inherent authoritarian nature of the system" (Piluso, 1991, p.339). It inflicts particular ideologies onto the people by means of a national curriculum and uses the school system as a "more direct and successful means of social control" (Shotton, 1990, p.3). The very presence of the school with its hierarchical and dominant structure is a mirror of society and, according to Piluso (1991):

> The root cause of childhood oppression in all forms and indeed, all oppression can be found in the very structure of our society – one based on domination, hierarchy and oppression (p.334).

It is held that the authoritarian nature of schools represses the 'free spirit' of children and Libertarians offer 'deschooling'[2] as a critique, a process of education that confronts societal problems by "nurturing the radical spirit" (Piluso, 1991, p.339) as opposed to repressing it.

William Godwin (1793) focussed on the causes of human behaviour, attempting to prove that circumstance and experience (i.e. the impressions upon individuals) are responsible for human disposition and action, as opposed to any original determination (p.29). Godwin (often seen as the 'father' of Anarchism) stated that the universe is composed of cause and event, making the introduction of an external force or an 'unknown cause' (e.g. genetic dispositions) 'exceptionable' (p.29). Of course, Godwin did not have the 'benefit'

of the knowledge of modern science to help inform this opinion, however his ideas for education are still worth investigation.

Based upon the ideas put forward by William Godwin, education could only flourish in a Libertarian[3] environment (Shotton, 1990, p.12). If characteristics are developed as a result of impression and children are all capable of becoming rational beings, it necessarily follows that education should be free from coercion from either the state or the teacher, in order to develop free consciousness. Godwin argues therefore strongly against a national education system, which would inevitably "encourage the acceptance of existing social arrangements and institutions, subvert the development of a free consciousness, and seek to strengthen the state" (cited in Smith, 2003). Children should be persuaded to learn, not obligated by either the state or their educator.

The role of the teacher, according to this ideology, is to provide motivation and guidance, and Godwin is confident that truth and reason will motivate a child to learn: "I may recommend some species of knowledge by a display of the advantages which will necessarily attend upon its acquisition".[4] Therefore, teachers must not exercise tyranny over their pupils, but treat them as equals, the "pupil should go first and the master follow" (in Locke, 1980, p.21). To develop freely, it is necessary for children to have control over their own learning: "Suffer him in some instances to select his own course of reading. There is danger that there should be something too studied and monotonous in the selection we should make for him".[5]

This is an extremely optimistic approach, relying on the assumption that children wish to learn, and will develop naturally into rational adults (Locke, 1980, p.24). If genes do play a substantial part in determining behaviour[6], there is clearly danger in allowing children to develop 'freely'. Interestingly, Godwin himself later recognised the influences he had previously denied in his text: "I am…desirous of retracting the opinions I have given favourable to Helvetius' doctrine of the equality of intellectual beings as they are born…there are differences of the highest importance" (1798, in Locke, 1980, p.140). Godwin continued though to stand by his recommendations for education even after rethinking the views in this text, still believing that education is 'a most powerful instrument' and with the "appropriate training, the relevant experience and the necessary education…every child…is susceptible to the communication of wisdom" (Godwin, 1876, cited in Locke, 1980, p.141). The debate regarding the proportional influence of genetics and environment continues, but as Trigg says: "…it is artificial to insist that it is the gene, or the environment, rather than the combination of the

two…since it is in the very nature of evolution that the two act on each other, any theory which ignores the contribution of both is heading for trouble" (Trigg, 1982, p.viii). Until the level of significance of biology[7] can be undoubtedly proven, discussion surrounding 'appropriate' education will not cease (See also the work of Caplan, 1978; and Gale and Eysenck, 1992 - for further discussion of these issues).

Cedric Cullingford however, recognises that pupils do accept overall authority, just not being 'singled out' (2002, p.124) so the Anarchist perspective is generally seen as extreme. There has been extensive research into the issue regarding children's relationships with teachers, and pupils' apparent feelings of oppression, and there are a number of responses to the problem. Slightly less radical a response than Anarchism, although still radical left, is that of Marxist sociologists. Bowles and Gintis (1976) (in Moore et al 2001, p.67; and Bartlett et al 2001, p.4), argue that the school system is designed to deprive and advantage certain 'types' of pupil in order to maintain current social order. They claim that this is achieved through a 'hidden curriculum', enforced by both educational policy and individual teachers' discrimination, that lulls pupils into a state of 'false consciousness' in their ability (DiMarco, 2002a; this approach will be returned to in more detail shortly). Cullingford (2002) has noted that in the current climate of testing and 'improving standards', children are made to feel that they are never quite good enough (130) and so often develop learned helplessness affecting their subsequent lives (See also Pellegrini and Blatchford, 2000, Chapters 8 and 11; Santrock, 2004, chapters 5, 7 and 13).

Cullingford also discusses the monumental issue of unfairness within school. In particular, he indicates that positive discrimination and varying approaches to discipline result in confusion of children as to the expectations upon them (pp.126-7). Variation in teaching methods can be a problem as the motive of the teacher is often interpreted by pupils to be 'convenience' based (p.132).

On a more micro level, there are also explanations for the feelings of oppression experienced by so many pupils. The Interactionist approach focuses on the interaction between teacher and pupil and the meanings drawn from it, which are highly influential to a child's experience of school (DiMarco, 2002b).

Many educationalists have used variations of Becker's 'labelling theory' – that is when teachers attach particular 'labels' and thus expectations on particular students. These labels can be attributed in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons. Consciously or subconsciously, teachers 'label' pupils as good or bad, hard working

or lazy. The child of a friend of mine, born to a sixteen year old single mother, living on benefits in a council flat, told me that he is: "blamed every day for anything that goes wrong … I used to be naughty and lazy, but I'm not any more I try really hard and my teacher's still horrible to me – I hate him". Working class students, due to the different cultural capital they bring to school, are often labelled more negatively than middle class pupils. Teachers expect middle class children to perform well in school, and so place high expectations upon them resulting in high achievement. Working class children however are often not expected to do well by their teachers, and so less expectation is placed upon them – or even the expectation of 'failure'. Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1966) undertook considerable study into the concept of the 'self fulfilling prophecy' (S-F-P). That is, if a child is expected to achieve by others, they will. If on the other hand they are expected to perform badly, they often feel incapable and so act in the spirit of the S-F-P by means of failure (cited in DiMarco, 2002a).

Labelling theory often implies the fault of the teacher, but as Willis' (1977) extensive study into the achievement of working class children suggests, pupils often make a conscious decision to reject their schooling if they feel they will not need it (See also Moore *et al*, 2001, p.68). In cases like this, as Cullingford is aware (2002, p.117), there is little teachers can do. However, discrimination exercised by teachers is an important factor. Some examples of how teachers can contribute to the under-achievement of the working class follow:

Example one exemplifies the different levels of expectation placed on pupils by their teachers:

Teacher: *Good morning class, now let's hand in the homework task please*

Working class pupil: *I haven't got it sir*

T: *Well there's a surprise, just for a change!*

Middle class pupil: *I haven't got it either, sorry*

T: *Oh really (name of **m/c**), I am disappointed – I expect that from (name of **w/c**) not you. Make sure I have it tomorrow ok.*

We see here an obvious difference in expectation – teachers *must* avoid such discrimination.

Example two (below) of how teachers can contribute to the problem exemplifies the gap in discussion time apparent between the social classes. Duffield and her colleagues found in their 1990s study (cited by Hill in Matheson and Grovesnor, 1999, p.96) that pupils in working class schools spent 3-6% of their time in discussion, in comparison to 17-25% of time in middle class schools:

Teacher: *ok, your group (to 'lower set' group), there are some problems on the board, please sit quietly and work through them. This group (to top set group), I'd like you to go and discuss amongst yourselves in what context you may need these problems after you leave school – what skills have been learnt?*

As we see, even within the same school, streaming can often have the same effect - Keddie described streaming as 'institutionalised labelling' (DiMarco, 2002a).

And again:

T: *(to **w/c**) Right, would you like to put the pencils away (name), and would you like to collect the books (name of **m/c**)*
M/c does as asked, w/c sits down
T: *I have just asked you to put those pencils away (name), why are you sitting there? Now do as you are told please. Thank you (**m/c** name) for doing it first time – one table point.*

This part is an example of what Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford (2003) call the 'hidden curriculum of language'. They refer to Bernstein's work, which recognised that the middle classes speak in an 'elaborated' language code, as opposed to the working classes 'restricted code'. The language of teachers, and also of textbooks, is presented in an elaborated code that is different from the one working class children are accustomed to, and that they must learn in order to survive school. Working class children are generally more used to direct commands, and may not understand fully that they are being told to do something, as opposed to being asked whether they would like to - as Hill comments (in Matheson and Grovesnor, 1999, p.94):

"This type of cultural capital is *'knowing how'*, how to speak to teachers, not only knowing *about* books, but knowing *how* to talk about them. It is knowing *how* to talk with the teacher, with what body language, accent, colloquialisms, register of voice, grammatical exactitude in terms of the 'elaborated code' of language and its associated *habitus*, or way of behaving."

During my own time spent in a reception class setting last year, I experienced first hand what Bernstein and Hill refer to. One particular child (the only black child in the whole class) would respond with blank stares to my greetings of "Good morning Lorenzo, how are you today?" However, when I reflected on this research, I changed my greeting to "Alright Lorenzo? How you doing?" and he would always answer. I changed my mode of language at random times, yet his responses remained consistent. This is clearly something that teachers ought to be aware of.

So undoubtedly, teacher training is in need of improvement, drawing attention to issues of equality. Nevertheless, teachers can't be responsible for everything; they work within a system that encourages acceptance of middle class values. There follow a few examples of how schools themselves can contribute to the under achievement of the working classes:

Trips — the materially deprived often struggle to afford school trips. Some schools are addressing the problem by way of 'voluntary contribution' policies BUT often, if not enough money is contributed, the trip does not take place (or only those that pay attend). This obviously has an effect on equality in achievement.

Uniform — supposed to break down class barriers, but is extremely costly for parents whose children may otherwise wear second hand clothes. A controversial issue.

'Praise and Reward' policies — although intended to recognise any form of 'improvement', these policies often clearly reward behaviour that middle class children are accustomed to (e.g. in example 3, a table point was awarded for the child who understood the 'elaborated code').

'Technology' — it is becoming increasingly important for students to have Internet access to aid their study. Working class students' are less likely to be able to access the variety of information available to the middle classes.

...The list goes on...

But why do our schools work this way? Moreover, are they *intended* to work this way? Two approaches to education and their views on inequality will now be discussed. The Functionalist Perspective (based largely on the works of Davis and Moore, 1967; Durkheim, 1947, 1968; Parsons, 1960, 1964 (cited in Bartlett *et al*, 2001, pp.4-8; Hill and Cole (2001) ch.7; Hill, cited in Matheson and

Grovesnor, 2000, ch.7) is based on the premise that education works alongside other social institutions to maintain the whole society. Its main functions are: the development of basic skills (i.e. Literacy/Numeracy); socialisation into acceptance of culture, norms and values; social control/maintaining social order, and preparation for work (role allocation) (Bartlett *et al*, 2001, p.8). This results in social reproduction:

> By reinforcing the status quo these functions actually benefit those who are in the best positions. They maintain stability and thus it is easier for those at the top to ensure that their children follow in their footsteps. Those at the bottom are, by and large, kept there. It is pointed out that it is largely their own fault for not taking the opportunities on offer. Thus, inequality is perpetuated and regarded as 'natural' (*ibid*).

The school system works then to serve the interests of the ruling classes. Inequalities are necessary for economic stability - Functionalists assume that if a properly meritocratic school system were set up, everyone would have equal chance of success (Hill and Cole, 2001, p.145).

For Marxists (such as Althusser; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu, 1977; Sarup, 1983, cited in Bartlett *et al*, 2001, p.9); Hill and Cole, 2001, ch.7; Hill, cited in Matheson and Grovesnor, 2000, ch.7), the purpose of formal education is also seen as maintaining social order and perpetuating existing inequalities, to reproduce capitalist society culturally, economically and ideologically. Capitalism relies on schools slotting certain people into certain sectors of the economy (Hill and Cole, 2001, p.148 - with reference to Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Unlike Functionalists however, Marxists believe this to be immoral, and in need of radical change (Hill and Cole, 2001, p.148). Working class failure is also partly a result of the 'hidden curriculum', which regulates attitudes and behaviour. However, writers such as Giroux, McLaren, Allman and Harker have stressed the role of teachers and students in 'resisting the reproduction of capitalism and agitating for social change' (*ibid*, p.149), as the working classes must become 'class-conscious' (i.e. aware of their own exploitation) in order for social change to occur.

So what, if anything can be done to improve things for working class students and bring more equality into education? The role of the teacher and their interaction with their pupils is vital. Teachers have the power to change pupils' feelings towards themselves, their teachers and their subjects:

> The fact that teachers have so much power is a matter of concern, especially for the teachers. The 'power' is not a question of automatic command but of centrality, of being seen as the mainstay of learning.

> They replace the subject as a centre of attention. They create or destroy different subjects through their relationship with the pupils (Cullingford, 2002, p.132).

Cullingford states that "the experience of school is focused on teachers" (2002, p.134) and that if social relationships are healthy, "all else follows" (p.135). As he explains, the view held by pupils with regard to teachers is well researched and longstanding (p.119) and he notes that "once the main purpose of school is lost...all that is left is the need for oppression, for discipline, for the insistence on obedience" (p.122).

These possible 'causes' for pupils feelings of oppression suggest the need for a more progressive pedagogy within the system. The current education system gives the same expectations to all pupils (in regard to academic results and behaviour), resulting in the 'failure' of many children academically, thus affecting personal and social aspects of the child's development and often leaving them with negative feelings towards school and education in general. Progressive education is child-centred, focusing on the readiness, interests, needs and skills of the child (Hill and Cole, 2001, p.15; Bartlett *et al*, 2001, p.14). Usually the progressive classroom will also be a democratic one with the teacher fulfilling the role of 'guide' as opposed to 'boss' (Shotton, 1990, pp.8-9), which helps to eliminate the problems of understanding the teacher's apparent inconsistencies in discipline and style. William Godwin also advocated discussion amongst children, stressing the importance of 'real' – not 'mock' discussion in order that they develop free, rational consciousness.

The role of the teacher is still vital in this environment – as Armstrong states: "Guidance is paramount. Without the systematic help of tutors or pedagogues only a few students are likely to direct their own learning successfully" (cited in Shotton, 1990, p.9).

Teachers have been constantly bombarded with imposed change of the education system in recent years. These changes, as recognised by Cullingford (2002, p.119), have contributed substantially to the deterioration of relationships experienced between children and their teachers. Without such outside pressure, perhaps teachers would be able to devote their time and attention to their students in such a way that would allow the development of trusting, healthy relationships in school.

There are clearly also issues regarding the content and nature of the curriculum that cause dilemmas for left-wing students like myself. If the school curriculum's subject matter were chosen largely in terms of its contribution to helping children to live a full

life, rather than in relation to the short-term needs of the economy, things could be very different.[8] A school's budget though is possibly its most restricting factor, more restrictive in all probability than its governing body or parental influence. There are so many suggestions made for 'better' schooling, more success and happiness, but they all require money. A school that did not have to worry about what it could afford would be open to immeasurable possibilities, with great significance for the improvement of teacher/pupil relationships.

Concerning a school curriculum, emphasis should be placed on 'subjects' that would be beneficial to both individuals and society in a holistic sense as opposed to an approach required for the continuance of capitalist society. Far more of the school day should be devoted to physical exercise (it is recommended that children are active outdoors for a minimum of thirty minutes a day), rather than mental exercise at desks. Schools (particularly primary) have been forced to cut back on P.E. time due to the pressures of the National Curriculum and children are becoming obese and unfit (at the cost of the NHS). Along these same lines, children need to receive proper information and training on diet and other health issues. Health is vital to a full and happy life, so it would follow that children require guidance on such issues from an early age. In the same spirit, environmental issues such as recycling and renewable energy sources should be at the forefront of all school teaching and practice.

If counselling and advice were made available to children, it would follow that they are more likely to become able to understand their feelings and be reflective in later life. This could have a significant effect on current anti-social problems. Emphasis should also be placed on exploration of cultural and religious issues, given the current climate of 'terror'. Children should be given unbiased information and time should be spent discussing issues in culturally diverse situations. The importance of tolerance to all others in life should be greatly encouraged. Like-minded educators would also greatly promote the introduction of politics, sociology and philosophy.

Similarly, more attention needs to be paid to Personal Health and Social Education. This subject concentrates on social and emotional issues which are relevant to all our lives – drug/alcohol awareness, relationship advice, family issues etc. In 2000, Bramall and White argued that the government ought to rethink the school curriculum from a top-down approach in line with the aims put forward in the post-2000 National Curriculum.[9] They believed that politicians had not previously considered the purposes of school education,

although they had taken responsibility for the content – this, they say, is inverted logic. Referring to the perceived ignorance of past government curriculum developers who "excelled at putting carts before horses" until the truth "dawned on them" (p.2) (see also the analogy of carpenters, p.1), Bramall and White (2000) still expressed scepticism towards future government reform. They did acknowledge the introduction of Personal, Social and Health Education (PHSE) and Citizenship into the curriculum, but still, they say, the majority of the problem lies in the foundation subjects established in 1988.

Bramall and White suggest changes to the curriculum – including the introduction of sociology, cultural studies and elementary ethics, but focusing particularly on changes within the fields of history, maths and modern foreign languages. They argue the case for making modern history compulsory until sixteen, on the grounds that the new aims "suggest a more extensive understanding of the modern world" (p.4), and for making mathematics voluntary – questioning its importance to "personal fulfilment and civic involvement" (p.5). They also suggest that a 'brief taster' in a modern foreign language is all that is necessary. They believed that these measures were what were needed for children to live a fuller life.

So far as the academic side of the curriculum, literacy and numeracy skills are of paramount importance. Detailed guidance in these areas can be provided as a basis for independent learning tasks in other subjects. The role of the teacher would be as a guide to study skills and to provide constructive feedback on children's individual studies. The subjects studied should be decided on a basis of individual interest and ability, as measured by a system such as Kudos[10], which encourages self-exploration and recognition of individual skills and talents. On the extreme end of the scale, a curriculum would be possible that was individually tailored to the needs of each child. For teachers in a money conscious school this sort of learning would be highly impractical. In a school with no budget however, the teacher/child ratio could be increased and one-to-one tuition would be available. This would be particularly beneficial to those children who require special needs assistance and are often not given the attention they require due to financial issues. Even in a school which followed a policy of group teaching as opposed to individual curricula, class sizes would be smaller as the school would not rely on numbers for grants, and the children would be able to work more at their own pace with as much time as required being devoted to their needs.

Numerous studies have shown that children from working class backgrounds consistently under-perform academically in comparison to middle class children. There are many contributing factors to this end, but material deprivation is certainly one of them. Children from deprived backgrounds are less likely to have the same facilities as richer families provide, such as computers and textbooks. If teachers did not have to be concerned with what the school could afford, children from such backgrounds could be given the same level of material input as their peers, thus generating a greater equality in learning. Similarly the drama, art, music and science resources available to schools with no financial boundaries would be immense.

With money as no object, all the needs of a child could be catered for – curriculum-based or otherwise. A teacher unconcerned about money would be able to recommend children for counselling and individual support if they felt it would help. Such a teacher would be free to offer all the solutions possible to children who may suffer behavioural difficulties, before having no choice but to exclude them from the school for the sake of the other learners. These children would then be given every chance possible before becoming 'drop outs'. More money would also allow more time and staff for communication and bonding with children with low self-expectation or esteem. This would allow teachers to do the best they can for all pupils. The possibilities for the school with no financial limitations are endless. Needless to say, the student/teacher relationship would undoubtedly improve - school would be a very different place to the environment most of us experience and the changes to society would be enormous.

However, in the past twenty years, the language of educational discourse has shifted away from being "child-centred" to being corporate-oriented. LEAs now have to cater to the 'business environment'. The Schools White Paper of October 2005 has only served to reinforce negative expectations upon the government regarding educational reform. As Rikowski and Rikowski (2006) state:

> ...This is what the White Paper is fundamentally about: part of the beginning of the business takeover of the state school system, and beyond this, to the commodification of educational services ... (p.4).

Dave Hill also realises that recent education reform has been concerned:

> ... to smooth the way for direct profit-taking/profiteering from education. It is about how capital wants to make direct profits from education. This centres on setting business 'free' in education for

profit-making and profit-taking by capital, extracting profits from privately controlled/owned schools … (Hill, 2005, p.260).

Rikowski and Rikowski (2006, p.5) say that this is just what the White Paper is for.

From the 'utopian' approaches just described, school would provide a firm foundation for a well-rounded individual to be able to make informed decisions regarding their own happiness and well being in later life. In order to achieve a system of this nature considerable time and money would be required, but the benefits to society in the long run would be apparent. A happy work force is a productive work force, so although it is not the sole intention, the economy would benefit from this type of education. Let's face it, if the government can find enough money to fight an illegal war, they can surely find the money to fund this type of education if they were actually committed to change.

As previously stated, my desire is to teach Lower Primary children – i.e. 3-7 year olds, but will this go against my principles? This depends upon the manner in which the classroom is run: so what does the research say about early formal education?

Three long-term studies began in the 1970s (noted by Fujikane, 2004), each studying groups of children learning. Some children experienced 'direct instruction' (teacher directed, academic style), and others were placed in a nursery model ('child initiated' learning activities). Children were placed randomly, regardless of IQ, social background etc. All 3 studies found that direct instruction led to children intellectually outperforming the 'child centred' group up to and including the year after Pre-School, but after that, the balance tipped. In 1 study, 78% of the child-initiated group graduated high school compared with just 48% of the group who experienced direct instruction (this pattern is also apparent from studies of the Norwegian school system (both cited in Fujikane, 2004, p.2).

According to Marcon (1992), children who delay academic practice have better verbal skills, and Dunn's research team (1994) found that receptive language skills are more developed allowing greater capacity for reading ability when they begin to learn. In addition, Shermon and Mueller (1996) found reading and maths scores were higher in 2nd grade for children who were being educated in what they call a 'developmentally appropriate' environment rather than didactic academic learning. To Schwienhart (1997), research suggests that formal academic instruction is likely to improve short-term cognitive skills at the risk of more damaging effects on social and emotional development. There is of course also the danger in early academic instruction that those who are incapable of early

achievement feel incompetent. This can lead to numerous behavioural and social problems that are difficult to fix later. This is particularly the case in the socially disadvantaged - in fact some American studies have suggested that children who are subject to early formal education are 3 times more likely to go to prison, twice as likely to be expelled and are significantly more likely to have poor marital or family relationships as well as difficulty in holding a job.[11] Katz (1999) also wisely points out that: "it is clearly not useful for a child to learn skills if, in the process of acquiring them, the disposition to use them is lost" e.g. there is no point teaching a child to read if by pushing them too soon they are unlikely to want to read as they get older.

So, the majority of studies indicate that a didactic, formal approach to learning is not necessary in the early years to develop cognitive academic skills, and it could lead to social and emotional difficulties later on. It is though my hope, that in a reception/key stage one classroom, there are still relatively fewer pressures on children to learn academically, and a less formal and more critical approach can be adopted. Children of this age group have the natural 'why?' instinct, and if this is not stifled at an early age, a critical mind is more likely to develop. I hope to equip my students with the skills of critical thinking from the outset of their school lives.

Education and Indoctrination

Thinking as a future teacher, I am becoming increasingly concerned with the whole concept of indoctrinating the children I teach. This is because at present they are being indoctrinated into capitalist thought through the 'actual' and 'hidden' curricula – this only aids in their commodification.

In his 1964 work, Wilson attempts to identify exactly what the objection to indoctrination is, and to advise as to how it may be avoided in the classroom. By the use of an analogy - describing a boy being hypnotised to master A' level physics - Wilson concludes that the opposition to indoctrination is not with the method employed, but with the type of subject matter being conveyed to the individual. Wilson believes that cases such as those described above should not be described as indoctrination, as the subject matter is unobjectionable – and indoctrination, he states, "represents...something pernicious" (1964, p.26). Describing the obvious historical cases of indoctrination, he states that our hostility towards the idea is not, as may be thought, in response to the deeply personal nature of political, religious and moral beliefs, but is

in fact due to their uncertainty. Wilson explains that, as rational people all over the world hold different ideological, moral and religious beliefs, we have no logical right to be sure of any 'correct' answers in areas such as this – any attempt to do so could be a highly dangerous activity, as can be recalled through "blood-stained history". Therefore, to avoid repeating such mistakes, Wilson goes on to explain how he believes teachers can avoid indoctrination. Wilson states that the beliefs (this would include ideologies) that are taught must be rational. This means, he explains, that they must have the 'general weight of evidence in their favour' and that they must be backed by publicly accepted evidence. Teaching, according to Wilson, should be 'graded' according to the logical status of the matter being taught – certainties (or as much as can be described as certain) may be taught as such, probabilities taught as probabilities, and uncertainties must not be taught. He states that the teacher must be concerned with providing the evidence for beliefs and not with inculcating the actual beliefs, and that the pupil must always be given opportunity, present or future, to reject the ideas presented to them.

Although he is correct in his suggestion that the teachers must concern themselves with evidence – and in giving the student the opportunity for rejection – there are some issues within Wilson's argument that must be addressed.

Firstly, before addressing how to avoid indoctrination, Wilson's definition of indoctrination is questionable. He assumes that the objection to it is unrelated to the method, and "is rather a difference in subject-matter" (Wilson, 1964, p.26). His definition is then rooted firmly in what is being indoctrinated and not the process of indoctrination itself. He states that: "if we want to keep the word 'indoctrination' as the name of a forbidden area, we shall probably want to say that these [learning through hypnosis etc] are not cases of indoctrination" (p.26). This will not suffice. Indoctrination is also a process, and so discussion must involve observations of objections to method as well as to content. His argument allows for the hypnotic transfer of 'certainties' in the sense of mathematics and Latin Grammar, but - whilst the position of such activities is debatable in its status as indoctrination as such (they would by some be considered indoctrination), they certainly could not be regarded as educational. Peters (1967, p.2), drawing on the work of Ryle, defines education as primarily an 'achievement' word but also a 'task' word, meaning that it must involve conscious activity on the part of the learner - ruling out hypnosis or 'downloading' information. So according to Peters' view, educational processes cannot include this type of learning.[12]

'Evidence' and 'rational methods' are also, as philosophers such as Laura (1983) and Neiman (1989, cited in Tan, 2004, p.258) observe, the focal points of any discussion on indoctrination. Wilson states that the general weight of evidence must be in their favour for beliefs to be considered rational. It must be noted here that the teacher may provide evidence in abundance (for beliefs or ideologies) – this does not necessarily rule out indoctrination. Evidence, as Wilson acknowledges, can be found in support of just about anything, and teachers can provide one-sided, selective, or narrow evidence to support the supposed rationality of a belief or idea. The events of World War Two (and many other historical events) are, for example, taught with different foci depending upon the country involved. Wilson attempts to deal with this problem by stating that evidence must be publicly accepted (1964, p.28), but this is where the second problem with his account lies - the notion of evidence must be examined further.

As well as being subject to change over time, 'publicly accepted evidence' is not necessarily accepted on a rational basis. The public are not all capable of obtaining empirical evidence first hand, or of intellectually determining its existence by the use of rational logic, and so at some point are subject to the interpretations of intellectual authorities. Take DNA, for example. There are few who know for certain that such a thing exists, therefore most of us must rely on the authority of others in relation to knowledge about it. The existence of DNA is backed by evidence that few understand, and can only interpret through others. Yet, its existence is clearly publicly accepted – the judicial system relies heavily on it. Therefore, if evidence is subject to intellectual authorities, this leaves room also for the possibility of hegemonic distortion, and thus, intentional or not, the possible indoctrination of irrational ideas. Indeed, our children are being indoctrinated with capitalist ideology as we speak.

So there is my dilemma. There are many other issues I have with the existing education system and its effects on the nature of society, as well as the ones discussed in this piece. But what can I do about it? I am, after all, just one person in a huge system – I can't make a difference. But what if I can? I am not deluding myself here that I can change the world for everyone – that would be arrogant, and based on the assumption that only 'my view' is 'right'. If however I can provide just some children with the skills they will need to continue the fight for social change, surely the classroom is the best place for me. I can make more contribution to the anti-capitalist cause by giving it a shot in my classroom than I can by just complaining about it all. I am certain that I can make more impact on the movement as an active education worker, influencing

the minds of the next generation, and hopefully changing the chances of just a few of them:

> "Good teachers swim against the current every day, teaching from the understanding that students are capable of comprehending and changing the world. Teachers do not have to be missionaries for capitalism and some, though far too few, are not" (Gibson, in Feldman and Lotz, 2004, p.248).

Finally, the question remains as to whether or not I will be able to fulfil my own human needs in this career, or if my life will be a constant battle against a system that will attempt to control me. To do this will mean absolute commitment to the cause, constant self-awareness and reflection. Teachers must keep focussed on their ideals, resisting the system – aided by the support of like-minded colleagues. I can be an idealistic teacher - why not? If I give in, where is the hope for education for social change? If everyone who felt that the world is in need of change became more pro-active, the world *would* change. Teaching puts me in the best position to understand the effects of capitalism at a grass roots level, and to attempt to combat them and put a stopper in the organic reproduction of the capitalist agenda.

Notes:

1. See Feldman and Lotz (2004) for explanation of the Thatcherite TINA statement – 'There Is No Alternative' (p.296).

2. Deschooling aims at the development of full, critically conscious people committed to social transformation. For an in depth explanation of its components see Piluso's work (Oct-Dec 1991) in 'Anarchist Quarterly'

3. Libertarianism is 'rooted in opposition to all forms of coercion' and stems from the work of John Locke (influenced by Godwin). See Shotton (1990) and Marshall (1998, pp.367-368).

4. William Godwin, "Of The Communication of Knowledge", *Enquirer,* IX in Anon (und) *William Godwin on Education*.

5. William Godwin, "Of Choice in Reading", *Enquirer,* IX in Anon (und) *William Godwin on Education*.

6. Studies have been carried out by various researchers, e.g. in relation to juvenile delinquency there is evidence of shared physical and personality traits such as; sturdier bodies; increased aggression; extrovert; impulsive; narcissistic. There is also however a strong correlation with social factors such as; family breakdown; single or no parent families; alcohol/drug abusing parents; poverty; abuse; erratic discipline and media influence. Studies on multiple births and adopted children have also revealed findings to support both sides of the debate. See Comptons Interactive Encyclopaedia, and Gale and Eysenck (1992) for information.

7. The first use of the term sociobiology likely dates to the work of Warder C. Allee, Alfred E. Emerson, and their associates in their 1949 book, *Principles of*

Animal Ecology. Modern Sociobiology centers on E.O. Wilson's *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1970). He defined it as "the systematic study of the biological basis of all behaviour". It is the study of all social species and has analysed human behaviour in relation to genes (e.g. criminal behaviour can be analysed through sociobiology). As explained by Trigg: "sociobiology seizes on the notion of the gene as the unit of evolution, and tries to trace significant aspects of behaviour back to the continuing influence of genes as they are passed on from one generation to the next. The aim of behaviour would be seen as the maximizing of genetic fitness, in the sense that behaviour that led to the disappearance of the genes producing it would itself disappear. The behaviour which persists is that which enables particular genes to reproduce" (Trigg, 1982, p.X). In short, sociobiology is concerned with the social interactions within a given species and focuses on such issues as whether certain traits are inherited or are culturally induced (Compton's interactive encyclopedia).

8. The ranges of possible responses to the questions posed about curriculum content are as vast as the range of opinions on what constitutes a 'full life'. For some this may be interpreted as a life filled with adventure and excitement, for others, a stable and secure financial existence is enough, and yet again for others all that they require is the presence of a family and friends to be fulfilled. For me, and for the purpose of this argument, a 'full life' means a holistic life, with equal emphasis placed upon physical, mental, social and emotional well-being.

9. The authors have been careful in their use of language to avoid assumption that they are referring to education in the E_3 sense (see Hamm, 1989, pp.30-31); rather they are talking about E_2 type school education. It would, according to Hamm (44-58) be illogical to discuss the aims of education if discussing E_3 education, the value of which is deemed intrinsic, requiring therefore no aims. Instead, the authors of this piece refer to the 'purposes' and 'goals' of school education when using their own words, only talking of 'aims and values' in the context of the government proposals.

10. Kudos is a computer programme used in Careers Guidance. It follows a series of questions answered by the student, and then offers a range of possible career choices suited to their interests and self-recognised skills or abilities.

11. According to Funk (1995b) cited in Funk (1998).

12. Peters' philosophy of education has been defined by Hamm as "the achievement of a desirable state of mind characterised by knowledge and understanding in breadth and depth with cognitive perspective...brought about deliberately, in a manner not to infringe upon the voluntariness and wittingness on the part of the learner" (1989, p.39, my emphasis). His view, though widely debated has, according to Hamm (1989, p.32), met no successful challenges to its central claims. The criterion laid down in order for someone to be considered 'educated' in Peters' view, are based in standards of knowledge that favour certain areas of society. Although Hamm, in his analysis of this issue, believes in the 'random distribution of talent at birth' (1989, p.41), there has been overwhelming evidence in recent years that suggests that a large proportion of the population, due to issues such as class, race or gender, may be given little opportunity to even attempt to meet such demanding criteria. But Peters' argument also raises the issue of voluntary, active participation of the learner. Formal schooling is compulsory - indeed if children do not go then their parents face prosecution. Peters' view would suggest then that none of our children are actually receiving any form of education. Of course, it is possible that children forced to attend school will still partake voluntarily in their lessons, but if they do

not want to attend in the first place, this is surely "infringing upon their wittingness".

In his notion of education and what it is to be an 'educated person', R.S. Peters has attempted to provide an account to be sustained irrelevant to the circumstances of the era. Time, culture and politics inevitably change the aims and purposes of education as the society it exists within transforms. What is considered worthwhile and intrinsically or morally valuable may differ greatly according to social and historical context. The processes required in order to "bring about a desirable state of mind in a morally unobjectionable manner" (Peters, 1966, p.27) are likely to be debated until the end of time.

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