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Pedagogy and Enlightenment

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ABSTRACT This article aims to connect and ground the innovative pedagogies described in this issue by looking at the meaning of 'pedagogy' in a holistic way. Drawing on a strong European tradition which originated in the German Enlightenment, it outlines deep principles such as independent thinking, criticality, freedom and social engagement. In particular, it draws on work by Wolfgang Klafki to update and adapt these principles to the urgent needs of a world in crisis. Klafki, for example, shows how education can be simultaneously challenging and learner-friendly, and how curriculum can be shaped to focus on the major issues of our time. The final part of the article challenges the reductionism of the set of ideas which underpin government policy, and the intellectual limitations of government-sponsored ideologues in their facile use of the concept of a 'knowledge-based curriculum'.

Pedagogy: more than a posh word for 'teaching methods'

It is 40 years since the great socialist historian of education Brian Simon (1981) raised the question 'Why no pedagogy in England?'. His explanation was that the elite private schools were more concerned with 'character-building' for empire-building and the elementary schools were constrained to basic literacy and numeracy, and an ethos of subordination. English universities had been very slow to establish a systematic study of education.

The term 'pedagogy' has become fashionable, but is it just a pretentious alternative to 'teaching methods'? That is certainly an implication when it is used in the plural – 'pedagogies'. Looking at the way the word is used in mainland Europe, Robin Alexander (2008) argues that pedagogy involves not only the practice of teaching, but all the 'theories, values, evidence and justifications' (p. 47) which underlie decisions about what and how to teach. He insists that 'a view of what it is to be educated' is fundamental (p. 47).

In this perspective, Alexander outlines three kinds of knowledge (and aspects of practice) which together make up pedagogy. First, there are the questions of 'what is to be taught, to whom and how' (p. 48) – the nature of

children, learning, teaching and curriculum. Second, we have the impact of the school as a formal institution, and national and local policy. Third, we have the wider context, involving deeper questions about community, culture and self. These include family expectations, society's view of education and ideas on 'what it is to be a person, an individual relating to others and to the wider society', questions of 'human identity and social purpose without which teaching makes little sense' (pp. 48-49).

Pedagogy and the Enlightenment

Alexander has studied education in various European countries, but even this outline seems to understate the meaning of pedagogy, particularly as it developed in central and northern Europe. Originating in Germany in the late 1700s, it arose out of the Enlightenment, a movement which challenged traditional views of the world based on the authority of the Church and aristocratic states. The philosopher Immanuel Kant, in his *Lectures on Pedagogy*, held that '[e]ducation holds the great secret of the perfection of human nature'. In a short essay of 1784, 'What Is Enlightenment?', he wrote: 'Dare to know: have the courage to use your own understanding' – in other words, dare to think for yourself. This would require courage, freedom and education – a new kind of education which encouraged independence of thought.[1]

The power of Germany's petty aristocrats could not prevent networks of educated people – doctors, lawyers, clergy, officials and writers – becoming established. Through debates, letters, mutual visits and journals, radical new ways of understanding the world were established. The fundamental Enlightenment beliefs were that all people have the capacity for reasoning, and that the world can be reshaped by human beings. This is a vision of human progress.

The word 'pedagogy' was often accompanied by another keyword, *Bildung* ('human formation'), which is still central to educational thought in Germany. Education is about human development – development of the individual and of human society as a whole. Human life, with its fullness of experiences, is itself educational. The educational pioneers of that time argued that human beings cannot be educated 'by commands, instructions, warnings or punishments ... this requires creativity, challenges, advice and support' (Johann Bernhard Basedow, quoted in Schmitt, 2003, pp. 120-121). Basedow's school, established in 1774, became the inspiration for progressive schools across Germany, with an influence on educational pioneers such as Friedrich Fröbel and Robert Owen throughout the following century. Of course, the progressives were also ridiculed by those who claimed that these new schools taught children to be lazy and have fun, rather than work hard and learn: 'They take the kids on walks, look at the plants and catch a few butterflies' (Bernhard Snethlage [1794], quoted in Schmitt, 2003, p. 138).

With hindsight, we know that the Enlightenment dream of progress hit barriers. Science has had some negative consequences which we have not yet

learned to control. As Karl Marx saw, the replacement of aristocratic power by bourgeois/capitalist power was not the end of history but the start of a new structure of oppression based on capitalists exploiting workers. This does not mean that the Enlightenment's social and educational ideas and ideals can be abandoned; we need them more than ever.

Klafki: rethinking education and human development

Wolfgang Klafki is arguably Germany's greatest educational thinker in modern times. He has defended Enlightenment ideals against postmodernist critics, and thought about their educational implications for our times. His thinking on education starts from Kant's argument that reason involves ethical responsibility, not simply mental activity.

Klafki (1990) insists on the close connection between individual and social learning. He sees education as an active and engaged connection between three capabilities:

> – the capacity of *individuals* to *make sense* of their own lives, including social, occupational, ethical and religious aspects;
> – the capacity to *work with others*, because everybody has responsibility for the shaping of our common cultural, social and political relationships; and
> – the capacity for *solidarity* in that a person's claim for self-determination and the right to participate with others can only be justified if we recognise, indeed actively engage ourselves in, the rights of others. We cannot truly flourish if others are underprivileged or oppressed. (pp. 93-94)[2]

He argues for a general (universal, common) education:

> (a) It must be education *for all* – available to all, as a democratic civil right and the condition for self-determination.
> (b) It must be education in the *medium of what we all share* – it can only develop collaboration and solidarity if it has a focus on what our lives have in common. It must engage with common problems and challenges of the present and potential futures. The horizon can no longer be national; we need a global perspective.
> (c) It must involve the development of *all our capacities*: cognitive, manual/technical, social, aesthetic/creative, ethical/political. (p. 94)

Point (a) requires the removal of structural hierarchies and divisions, such as selection, divisions by ability, and early tracking into 'academic' and 'vocational' curricula. For example, adult education should involve both vocational/specialist and general/political aspects. Point (b) involves a focus on the key issues for our time – issues that concern our present lives and, as far as we can understand, our common future. He highlights peace; the environment; abolishing inequalities of class, gender, disability, (un)employment and national

citizenship; a critical understanding of new technologies; and relating to others (pp. 95-98). The curriculum must centre on these common issues in ways which genuinely engage young people. Learners must develop a personal responsibility for grappling with such problems in a genuine dialogue with their teachers. This involves certain basic attitudes and capacities:

– *criticality, including self-questioning;*
– *being prepared to argue and reach shared understandings;*
– *empathy – the ability to see things from another's perspective;*
– *joined-up thinking. (pp. 98-99)*

Education has to be many-sided, involving the development of cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, social and practical/technical abilities. Individuals should be able to pursue chosen cultural interests. Klafki adds to this list the possibility of orientating your life according to a particular set of ethical or religious meanings.

Finally, Klafki refers to key skills such as speaking, writing, calculating, exact observation and technical capabilities, as well as virtues such as concentration, perseverance and care. However, he expresses an important concern. These skills and qualities are not the final aim of education. They can be used for good or bad purposes, for domination as well as for peace. The social aims of education are the most important, whilst involving skills as a necessary set of tools for human development (p. 102).

Planning Teaching and Learning

Klafki is also well known for a focus on the practicalities of curriculum planning and teaching methods, but this too focuses on what is most important. Planning and teaching should never involve a rush to 'cover the curriculum'. Teaching methods are 'the crowning element' of planning but rest on the foundations of choosing appropriate subject matter (Klafki, 2000, p. 143). However detailed or open the set curriculum is, teachers still have to make choices, reconciling what is important in the world with what learners are ready to engage with. Klafki calls this 'exemplary learning' and describes some key steps in planning it:

> 1. What wider or general sense or reality does the content exemplify and open up to the learner? What basic phenomenon or fundamental principle, what law, criterion, problem, method, technique or attitude can be grasped by dealing with this content as an 'example'. (p. 151)

For example, a particular event in Britain's conquest of India might illustrate a common pattern of imperialism.

> 2. What significance does the content in question, or the experience, knowledge, ability or skill to be acquired through this topic, already possess in the minds of the children in my class? What significance should it have from a pedagogical point of view? (p. 151)

Klafki places great stress on how the lesson can connect with the child's life:

> Thus we ask what importance electricity, animals, foreign lands, music, crafts, stories ... have for the child outside school, and in what sense they could or should become significant ...
>
> To clarify: Has the planned topic already come up in questions occurring in class? Is the topic familiar to these children (to some? to all?) in their out-of-school experience? Does it play a vital role in their school or out-of-school life? From which angles do the students already have access to the topic? Which angles are still unfamiliar? (p. 152)
>
> 3. What constitutes the topic's significance for the children's future? (p. 152)

For example, can learning about the Suffragettes be related to discussion or role play about possible future societies? Can children be encouraged to think about their own expectations?

All of this requires attention to detail, sequencing, key concepts and so on, and an awareness of what children will find difficult. A topic may have different layers – for example, the Russian Revolution involves historical events, political ideology, and political and sociological concepts (state, class, revolution) (p. 154). In planning lessons, teachers should consider what knowledge it is most important to retain – the 'minimum knowledge' – and how to make this come alive to every child (p. 155). Which facts and situations – in other words, experiences – will excite pupils into asking questions? 'What pictures, hints, situations, observations, stories, experiments, models' will have 'symbolic significance' (p. 156).

All of this depends on a reflection about the broad aims of education in our times, and about the challenges of an uncertain future. Teaching methods must further the pedagogical aims outlined earlier, for example:

– *criticality*, including self-questioning;
– being prepared to *argue* and reach shared understandings;
– *empathy* – the ability to see things from another's perspective;
– *joined-up thinking*. (Klafki, 1990, pp. 98-99)

They must further young people's ability to find their place in the world:

– the capacity of *individuals* to *make sense* of their own lives;
– the capacity to *work with others*;
– the capacity for *solidarity*. (pp. 93-94)

Powerful Knowledge?

This is a world apart from the present state of education in England and the policy driving it. This journal has discussed extensively the limitations of the National Curriculum in the version established by Michael Gove. It has

demonstrated the impact of high-stakes testing on teaching and learning. There is no point in repeating that here. However, there is more to say about some of the ideas which are currently driving government policy.[3]

One keyword used in the government's polemics is 'knowledge', with the claim that education before the arrival of Gove suffered from too little of it. Unlike Klafki with his deep understanding of pedagogy, Gove's knowledge is separate from life and human development. We have, however, to distinguish two major currents in the argument used by Gove, led by Michael Young and E.D. Hirsch.

Young has claimed to be 'bringing knowledge back in' (the title of his 2008 book). Young and his associates argue that they are reintroducing 'powerful knowledge' and, on the surface, this has an appeal. As the saying goes, 'Knowledge is power', but not all knowledge empowers – much of it is trivial, arcane, archaic or erroneous. There is nothing particularly empowering in children learning their eight-times tables or frontal adverbials.

Young's attempts to define 'powerful knowledge' for the school curriculum take us in two problematic directions. First is knowledge as established by academics. This ignores the disagreements about paradigms, the struggles over interpretations, and the vast range of subject matter covered by, say, physicists or geographers. It takes us no nearer a workable set of criteria for selecting what to teach. Second, Young regards knowledge that is divorced from everyday experience as intrinsically superior. Whilst abstraction is an important step in theorising, good theoretical explanations often depend on a closeness to reality, a back and forth between abstraction and the experiential. Successful learning often depends on a flow between academic knowledge and vernacular experience. To insist on a separation between concepts and experience, as Young demands, is to reinforce

> standard educational processes whereby working-class culture is excluded and mis-recognized, where Indigenous knowledges are denied, where cultural differences are elided and only professional and higher class cultures and knowledges are ratified and become cultural, social and symbolic capital that advantages some and disadvantages others. (Wrigley et al, 2012, p. 199)

It would be a mistake simply to write off all of Young's arguments. He is right to denounce vocational courses which are based on a shallow understanding of practice, essentially on imitation and rules of imitation. He is also correct to challenge postmodern notions that all knowledge is socially relative, valid only for a particular ethnic group or gender. He is deeply mistaken, however, in asserting that making connections with children's lives and experiences is simply for the purpose of illustration, and that curriculum should be based entirely on an established 'canon' of knowledge defined by a particular group of academics (for a more detailed critique, see Wrigley, 2017).

Government ministers and Conservative think tanks such as Policy Exchange have used Young to give their preferences academic respectability – a

cause of embarrassment to him as his own political leanings are towards the Left. However, their mainstay is the highly reductionist position of E.D. Hirsch. Hirsch believes that lower-class Americans lack 'cultural literacy' and that this could be remedied if they were taught his list of essential facts. Apart from the important argument that his list is biased towards Anglo-European culture, knowledge reduced to lists of facts is anything but empowering. Gove's version of this in his initial proposal for primary history was satirised by his special adviser on school history, Simon Schama, in 2013: 'vroom, there was Disraeli; vroom, there was Gladstone ... the French Revolution, maybe if it's lucky, gets a drive-by ten minutes at this rate'. He described as 'Gradgrindian' cramming children with so many facts, and ridiculed the arbitrary selection of detail: 'There are no key developments in the reign of Aethelstan, because it's stupid really'. Schama went further and explicitly challenged the re-emergence of the New Right's 'glorious heritage' version of English history, and Gove's attempt to remove controversy from its study: 'There is a glory to British history, but the glory to British history is argument, dissent – the freedom to dispute. It's not an endless massage of self-congratulation'. He was particularly outraged by the offensiveness and insensitivity of the new National Curriculum's glorification of empire: 'Clive of India ... Robert Clive was a sociopathic corrupt thug whose business in India was essentially to enrich himself and his co-soldiers and traders as quickly and outrageously as possible'. There is nothing powerful about knowledge which is superficial or biased, and Hirsch's position is both. In order to illustrate this, the following extract from the US-based Core Knowledge Foundation (2013) strips the European conquest and devastation of the Americas to a list of neutral facts:

> – Slavery (Cuba, Puerto Rico, Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica)
> – Conquistadors: Cortés and Pizzaro (advantage of Spanish weapons; diseases devastate native peoples)

This drizzle of dead facts is but the shadow of knowledge – crumbs falling off the high table of culture (see also Wrigley, 2018).

One of the best-known advocates of Hirsch's view of knowledge in England is Daisy Christodoulou. Her provocative but muddled book *Seven Myths about Education* is, of course, right to argue that children should know where to find London on a map or that Africa is a continent not a single country. Such knowledge should not, however, be taught as isolated facts. She is quite wrong to suggest that John Dewey or Paulo Freire were somehow opposed to factual knowledge; neither has taken a stance against factual knowledge but they consistently emphasise the connection of knowledge with personal experience and activity, and with making sense of the world. Both see knowledge as part of the process whereby we become fully human. At one point, Christodoulou (2014, p. 20) insists that:

> learning the dates of 150 historical events from 3000bc to the present day and learning a couple of key facts about why each event

> was important will be of immense use, because it will form the fundamental chronological schema that is the basis of all historical understanding.

This argument is facile. Chronology alone does not provide a 'schema' for historical understanding, nor is there any simple linear development from 3000bc to 2020. Learning 150 dates, embellished with 'a couple of key facts', is less likely to provide a framework for historical understanding than a deeper understanding of perhaps 15 significant turning points or crises. It is such turning points, not isolated dates and facts, which can provide the exemplary learning which Klafki refers to, and which young people can use to mediate an understanding of the crises of their own time. Consider, for example, 1492, which marked Columbus's 'discovery' of America and the start of the conquest and, simultaneously, the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain. The dates of the First and Second World Wars are important markers, but their significance can hardly be grasped by 'a couple of key facts'. For some, exact dates are less important: the Reformation peaked early in the 1500s but cannot be reduced to a single date, not even Martin Luther's posting of his 95 theses in 1517. Indeed, the story of Luther nailing the theses to a church door could distract from understanding the significance of the Reformation.

Teaching 'Knowledge' without Pedagogy

For Christodoulou, as for Hirsch (who wrote the foreword to her book), knowledge equates with lists of facts. This is a reductionist understanding of knowledge, in obvious contrast with Klafki's thinking. It aligns with the equally reductionist view of education as a measurable accumulation of knowledge assumed by the English assessment system, and a reduction of teaching to instruction rather than pedagogy.

Over the past decade in particular, we have seen the growth of a new, and shallow, science of education which has turned its back on the rich knowledge developed in university faculties of education. This is systematic rejection, supported by the attempt to relocate teacher training in schools rather than a university–schools partnership. This is a world apart from the rich partnerships between university lecturers (often formerly schoolteachers), Her Majesty's Inspectors, local authority advisers and teachers, working together in curriculum associations such as the National Association for the Teaching of English – partnerships which led to the transformative curriculum developments of the 1970s.

Behaviourism or Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning

Overwhelmingly, current policies are underpinned by behaviourist assumptions about how and why learning happens. Implicit in behaviourist models of

learning – rooted in the conditioned behaviour of caged animals in laboratory conditions – is the idea that knowledge is forced on reluctant learners by more powerful individuals who will *condition* their beliefs. Behaviourism tacitly assumes that learning *happens to* learners – that learners are passive victims marked by something that intrudes from outside. The acquired behaviour makes little sense beyond an arbitrary association with basic animal needs (classically, a bell ringing with food). The dominance of behaviourism (originally known as 'reflexology' in Pavlov's day) similarly characterised the early days of the Soviet Union, when Vygotsky began his work. It is interesting to return to Vygotsky's critique of behaviourism/reflexology in a speech at the Second All-Russian Congress of Psychoneurologists in 1924. His clearest statement of the inadequacies of behaviourism appeared the following year in 'Consciousness as a Problem in the Psychology of Behaviour' (Vygotsky, 1925), an exemplary critique of the reductionism of this crude materialism which ignored consciousness and was over-reliant on the stimulus–response reflex.

Within several pages, Vygotsky has challenged the 'reflexologists' for:

- failing to distinguish between human and animal behaviour;
- inappropriately using physiology to explain psychology;
- refusing to think about consciousness or language;
- assuming that observable behaviours are sufficient for building a theory; and
- a neglect of historical and social dimensions.

Far from aligning with Marxism, as its advocates assumed (Kozulin, 2005), this reductionist version of materialism lacks any emancipatory potential. The reflexologists had failed to grasp the most basic difference between human beings and animals:

> Whereas animals passively adapt to the environment, man actively adapts the environment to himself ... The spider that weaves his web and the bee that builds his cell out of wax do this out of instinct, mechanically, always in the same way, and in doing so they never display any more activity than in any other adaptive reactions. But the situation is different with a weaver or an architect. As Marx said, they first built their works in their heads; the result of their labours existed before this labour in ideal form. (Vygotsky, 1925)

There is no room for imagination and creativity in the behaviourist vision of human learning. This is why play is so important: it is crucially an occasion for the emergence of new meanings (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 92-104). The current 'schoolification' of early years education in England (Bradbury, 2018) erodes the foundations of expansive learning.

Conclusion

Education is about human fulfilment, as individuals and humanity. It involves us developing as human beings in engagement with the world and in our growing responsibility for the world. It is about emergence, not closure.

The process is sensitive, complex and exploratory. It cannot – must not – be pinned down by tight regulations and surveillance. Educators need to be alert not only to learners' particular and changing abilities and difficulties, but also to the world and its possible futures. This is not helped by the reductionist thinking which characterises the current policy regime. Today more than ever, education requires a practical creativity which is thoughtful and socially engaged.

This issue of *FORUM* pulls together multiple examples of teaching which respond to that challenge. The aim of this particular article is to ground that creativity in a discussion of 'pedagogy' in a sense which goes beyond specific teaching methods and activities. A deep understanding of pedagogical principles provides a sense of direction for practical innovation. It shows the connectedness and deep meaning of the specific 'pedagogies' applied across the curriculum. It helps justify progressive and humane teaching methods against those who claim their 'ineffectiveness'. 'Pedagogy' gives moral strength to teachers by providing a strong validation of diverse creative and critical 'pedagogies' in the hostile climate of English education.

Notes

[1] For an excellent introduction to the German Enlightenment and education, see Reed (2015, pp. 135-157).

[2] This and some of the other translations from Klafki's chapter are slightly abbreviated for greater clarity.

[3] I am thinking not only of the Department for Education and Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), but also ideas which are promoted by groups of supposedly independent thinkers closely aligned to Nick Gibb and other government ministers.

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