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GATEway2Success Open Day and MEaP Symposium, April 2nd 2016

Commentary

Mentoring in Community Education

To educate people to be able to see the mechanisms of social oppression. Now, that is a thought!

But what would that actually look like in the classroom?

For starters, we would need to look at the skills and knowledge base of our teachers. Being only able to teach a subject and its successful examination pass methods is akin to giving someone only a road map of say, France but not teaching them French or anything about France or its cultures. So upon arrival in France, they soon discover that the map is either out of date or doesn't include the side roads and back alleys that only the locals know about. Of course, because they can't speak French or know anything about the local culture or customs, it then becomes almost impossible to learn the local knowledge required to navigate the increasingly important side roads and back alleys that are unmarked on the map. Note, not impossible but extremely difficult! So, even though the French road map has its uses especially for the motorway networks and their exits, for more localised knowledge it is of limited use without an acquaintance with the language, culture or the "concept" of France. For me, this is an important analogy for education because it exists as a political entity that is at the heart of how we view ourselves (nationally) and how we, as individuals want to fit into that view of the nation (citizenship). Education is the institutional tool that a nation chooses to transmit its values to its citizens.

Elsewhere, Tawat (2016) and Clennon (2016) outline the processes of how nations devise national myths about themselves as a means of generating a simplified national unity around a (synthetic) cultural memory of itself. It is education that is used as the principal method for disseminating such myths about nations thus making it an omnipresent site of contestation and narrative for how our institutions manage and shape our society. Clearly, without an intimate understanding of these grand narratives about nation and citizenship (nation-building), how can we wage an effective war against social injustice and inequality? Here, I specifically mean that the patterns of social inequality we fight against are rooted in historical narratives and ideas that we



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need to understand first before we can effectively push back. This is what a critical pedagogy means in real terms for our young people. Seen in this light, an education that only addresses attainment is only part of the solution, as can be seen with BAME graduate employment and enterprise start up rates (Allen, 2016; HM Government, 2014). We need to seriously consider how we equip our teachers to be able to teach within this larger context.

So how can we mentor our teachers, parents and young people using a critical pedagogy?

Our supplementary schools have actually begun to address this already with studies into cultural heritage and history (Black history) with an emphasis on developing a cultural pride and self-awareness. However, I would suggest that our schools enhance their work in this area with the explicit teaching and examination of racism and structural discrimination. Fortunately, there are excellent teaching materials available such as the *Schools Stand Up2 Racism's* E-Learning resource (CHAWREC, 2016), which actively encourages critical thinking around the grand narratives around race and discrimination. Also in terms of broadening the range of critical thinkers we need to read (i.e. including non-Eurocentric thinkers and writers in the literature) there is the equally excellent site *Global Social Theory* (Warwick University, 2016), which outlines different conceptual frameworks and tools for understanding the global domination of the "system".

Again, what would this actually look like in the classroom?

I would suggest that whereas subject teaching for exam attainment has to remain at the centre of our schools' activities (using our analogy: learning to read the "French road map")¹, we should use our high quality extra-curricular activities to incorporate our critical pedagogy using some of the resources mentioned. Perhaps the mentoring of our teachers could come in the form of partnership work and 'team teaching' with academics and other professionals who would be able to bring these important issues to life in a fun and creative way, using media such as the Arts (revisiting our analogy: teaching "French" and "French culture" to accompany the "French road map").

Armed of course, with excellent subject attainment but also with an in depth understanding of the system within which their subjects, learning and attainment sit, I would hope that our students would not only be equipped with the tools necessary to

¹ And parents also need to be familiar with the road map of their children's education.



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navigate the system but also with the ability to generate the ideas necessary to change it.....

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