What lessons does the pedagogical approach of Paulo Freire have for the development of Citizenship as a national curriculum subject?

Abstract

This essay critically examines the pedagogical writings of Paulo Freire and considers what lessons it holds for the development of Citizenship teaching in England today. It argues that while the details of Paulo Freire’s educational programme are for another time and place, his approach to education, in teaching about the world through literacy programmes and rejecting the “banking” approach to education holds many lessons for educators today. This essay then relates Freire’s pedagogy to the development of political literacy as a strand of the Citizenship programme of study. It then considers the importance of developing a sense of agency amongst students in developing political literacy as opposed to political knowledge. It also contrasts Paulo Freire’s pedagogy with that proposed by The Crick Report (1998) and examines contemporary critiques of Crick’s approach to the development of political literacy and the Citizenship curriculum. It then examines omissions in Paulo Freire’s approach with particular reference to multiculturalism and consider how Freire’s pedagogy can be implemented in schools today.

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“If we don’t transcend the idea of education as pure transference of a knowledge that merely describes reality, we will prevent critical consciousness from emerging and thus reinforce political illiteracy.” Freire (1985:104)

Introduction

A spectre haunts the development of Citizenship education, that spectre is Paulo Freire. In the development of the Citizenship curriculum; in the contemporary debates on the implementation of The Crick Report and in the development of “Active Citizenship” Freire’s pedagogy casts a long shadow. Whether it is the current interest in Vygotsky, the debates around the construction of knowledge in the classroom or the political implications of financing education, the work of Freire cannot be ignored by any serious attempt to critique these developments and to understand their social context. The introduction of Citizenship into England’s curriculum has reignited debates about the political nature of education and the degree to which Citizenship should make a passive or active contribution to school life (Arthur & Davison 2000). These debates are at the very heart of Paulo Freire’s notions of Praxis, progressive teaching and the degree to which education can be a tool of social liberation. This essay examines the pedagogical writings of Paulo Freire and will consider their significance for the development of Citizenship teaching in England. It then compares and contrasts the pedagogical approach of Freire to that of Crick as developed in The Crick Report (1998) and other articles. It continues with an examination of contemporary critiques of Crick’s approach to Citizenship by educationalists such as Heater, Leighton, Walker and Osler and consider the degree to which these critiques follow Freire’s approach.

Then, taking Paulo Freire’s ideas of the progressive teacher and of Praxis, this essay examines how these approaches can be applied in the political literacy
Paulo Freire and Progressive Education

The Brazilian military coup d’etat of 1964 brought to end the National Programme of Literacy which Paulo Freire had launched only four months earlier. Yet this negation of his first educational programme and his subsequent sixteen years of exile provided his progressive educational methods and the constructivist approach to pedagogy with an international profile. The negation of the negation came in 1989 when Paulo Freire accepted the post of Secretary of Education in the state of Sao Paulo now under democracy. This position allowed Freire to put his pedagogical approach into practise. He took the constructivist ideas that he had outlined in the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, The Politics of Education and his other writings in exile and implemented them in his native Brazil. Two significant achievements from his term as Secretary of Education were in the field of adult literacy and in the development of primary school teaching.

The first saw the creation of a Literacy Training Movement which was a partnership between his Office and social movements in Sao Paulo. Through this Movement (itself an implementation of Freirean Praxis) Freire promoted an education of questioning, based upon the vocabulary of the learners daily lives in which the dialogue between the participants would address the questions of their social conditions. Thus teaching words becomes a means to teaching about the world rather than an end in itself. The involvement of social movements then put social action at the centre of this learning which
demonstrated dialogic action theory, or the notion of *Praxis* that Freire had developed in exile.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire develops this notion of *Praxis* as a dialogue between action and reflection in the learning process. Through questioning, the learner develops their critical consciousness. It is the development of this critical consciousness combined with social action that is at the heart of Freire’s *Praxis*. He views the significance of critical consciousness as follows,

> “A more critical understanding of the situation of oppression does not yet liberate the oppressed. But the revelation is a step in the right direction. Now the person who has this understanding can engage in a political struggle for the transformation of the concrete conditions in which the oppression prevails.” (Freire 2004:23)

Without action this learning leads to what Freire describes as verbalism, whilst action devoid of reflection leads to activism. For Freire neither activism nor verbalism can be effective tools of liberation in the way that *Praxis* can. (Freire 1970:68-105)

The second area of success of Freire’s term in office was to improve the retention rates of the state’s primary schools from 79.46% to 87.7% (de Figueiredo-Cowen et al. 1995:6). Freire achieved this through engaging in a dialogue with the communities Sao Paulo and by removing the barriers that separated school and community. He then redesigned the curriculum to include rather than exclude the children of the lower social classes and promoted staff development and training for both teaching and non-teaching staff. The improvement in retention achieved by Freire is significant in that it demonstrates that his pedagogy, a constructivist approach to education, can overcome many of the barriers faced by students in the classroom.
Essential elements of Freire’s approach to education are his views on respect for student’s views, political neutrality in the classroom, progressive teaching and the creation of knowledge. Freire is clear that developing critical consciousness is not the same as having a class agree with the views of the teacher. This is an essential element of Freire’s pedagogy and he demands that teachers respect the conclusions that students draw even if they are reactionary in nature (de Figueiredo-Cowen 1995:21, 68-69).

For Freire the view that political neutrality in the classroom is either desirable or achievable is itself a politically constructed view. Implicit in the view of the classroom as politically neutrality is the idea that the classroom can be separated from the rest of society. Freire rejects this position, regarding neutrality as both an acceptance of the status quo in society and as dishonest in claiming the acceptance of any social situation as being neutral rather than being implicitly or explicitly supportive of that situation.

Freire concludes that there exist both progressive and reactionary teachers. This has been a controversial position with some educationalists arguing that professionalism produces a neutral teacher. However, Freire’s understanding that there are different types of teacher, reflecting different views from within society, allows us an analysis of the different styles and methodologies of teachers which goes beyond an explanation that rests on the personality of the teacher. For Freire a progressive teacher is one who uses questions to develop a dialogue with their students. This dialogue then allows their critical consciousness to develop. This does not negate the existence of the roles of teacher and student, rather it requires that the progressive teacher use their organisational role to encourage students to challenge and criticise and by
doing so take part in the creation of knowledge. The progressive teacher is one who rejects the “banking” concept of education in which, “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire 1970:53). For Freire a progressive pedagogy is one in which meaning is developed by active and critical students. He counter poses this progressive approach to one in which a narrative is to be memorised by passive students without critical analysis of the meaning or significance of the topic.

Comparative analysis of Freire and Crick

Bernard Crick has played a central role in the development of Citizenship teaching in England. He was Chairman of the Citizenship Advisory Group which produced the decisive report on the implementation of Citizenship in the national curriculum (Crick 1998, The Crick Report). Crick began writing about Citizenship education in the 1970s (Crick 2000) and this interest has continued with his involvement in various associations connected to teaching Citizenship and in the production of various articles and papers on the subject.

Crick then and now

In Crick’s writing of the 1970s we find a more progressive and left leaning educationalist than we do in The Crick Report. In Crick’s early work on political literacy (Crick 2000: 59-74) we find an approach which comes close to Freire in the call for active participation in political literacy education. However there remains a qualitative difference in the Freirean notion of Praxis, that is participation in the creation of knowledge and Crick’s early view of participation with receive knowledge. For Crick a possible outcome of his political literacy is change, for Freire it is social liberation. While social
liberation requires change, change should not be mistaken for social liberation.

Crick’s change in outlook over time is far from unusual in politics and in large part reflects the move to the right that was made by many within Crick’s own political party over this period. The political victory of Thatcherism and the collapse of alternative left wing programmes and social models which created the social basis for the development of new Labour also shaped the rightward shift in Crick’s writing. This becomes clearer with an examination of *The Crick Report*.

*The Crick Report* describes the three stands of Citizenship as, “social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy” (p13). It also sets out Crick’s aim for the subject’s inclusion in the curriculum;

> “We aim at no less than a change in the political culture of this country both nationally and locally; for people to think for themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to have an influence in public life and with the critical capacities to weigh evidence before speaking and acting…”(Crick 1998:7)

At first glance Cricks approach, of changing the political culture and of developing active citizens could be viewed as an example of Freire’s Praxis, however, on closer examination this initial view appears to be a mere chimera –a pale reflection of the Crick of the 1970s. Where Freire offers a pedagogy of liberation Crick offers a pedagogy of limited criticism and a defence of the social status quo. Examples of this outlook can be seen in both *The Crick Report* and his subsequent articles.

*The Crick Report* suggests that teaching Citizenship will provide a greater understanding of “changing nature” of the welfare state (p8) and how its former role can be taken on by voluntary groups (p10). This is an approach in which begins with the conclusions, that the nature of the welfare state needs
to be changed, and creates narrow parameters for a discussion of how this can be implemented. In this approach we can see that Crick’s view of having students thinking for themselves is not about developing their critical consciousness in the Freirean sense.

In a recent article in *Teaching Citizenship* Crick describes those who take a contrary view to him on the question of immigration controls as “high minded idiots” (issue 9:48). In this piece we find the very essence of Crick’s approach. Nowhere in Crick’s work do we find any element of self reflection or any attempt to understand the social basis from which his own views are constructed. This lack of self criticism diminishes any attempt to understand the development of a contrary point of view. Rather than examining why and how other views are constructed they are simply dismissed as wrong or the work of “idiots”. This approach is diametrically opposed to Freire’s whose constructivist methodology takes opinions to be socially constructed and as such instructive even if they are at odds with your own conclusions.

Crick’s approach is neither unbiased nor neutral. He is promoting a particular point of view which supports active involvement only to support this view. This is shown by the repeated use of the caveat “responsible” which is added to all references to taking action and is critiqued by Menter & Walker and Leighton (below).

Crick’s approach to the creation of knowledge is shown in his narrative or banking approach to British history. His comment about “our history” (sic) in the Crick Report is elaborated in the above article in *Teaching Citizenship*. Crick’s narrative constructs a 'golden thread' which he claims runs through
British history. It would seem incredible to claim that an exclusively progressive, rights based history exists from the citing of a few selective events from the past 900 years. Not only should the events he cites (Magna Carta, and subsequent Reform Acts) be understood within their own context, their existence fails to negate the parallel existence of reactionary threads running their course through this same period. A contrary view of British history could point to the subjugation of large sections of the globe in search of mercantile wealth and imperial power; repression against Catholics in the seventeenth and eighteenth century; the repression of the “six acts” and the Peterloo Massacre following the Napoleonic Wars and the transportation of trade unionists in the nineteenth century. Yet such a view would be just as partial and one sided. Many different and competing forces, not only weave their threads through the tapestry of history, but it is the dialectic of their opposition in action which is the driving force of historical change.

Crick's words are instructive because that they express his view of which history and which present his Citizenship curriculum seeks to promote. That is a history and present devoid of struggle, in which political participation finds its apotheosis at the ballot box.

Contemporary critical analysis of Crick

The limitations of Crick’s pedagogy are critiqued by a number of contemporary educationalists. Arthur and Davison disagree with Crick on the unbiased or neutral nature of Citizenship teaching. They take the view that it is possible to locate the various approaches to Citizenship teaching on a spectrum which ranges from passive to active. They critique Crick’s pedagogy as one which is passive and which;
“Seeks only to develop knowledge, understanding and behaviours – competence – in order to enable an individual to participate in the version of democracy which manifests itself in the United Kingdom.” (2000:11)

Their own view of active Citizenship is one that promotes “social literacy” which can only result from and education which;

“Empowers individuals by developing in them levels of criticality in order that they might question, critique, debate and even take a leadership role in the proposing alternative models of the structures and processes of democracy.” (2000:11)

In their position on active Citizenship it is possible to see Freire’s idea of the desire to develop critical consciousness. However they do not regard this approach to be Utopian or as one being promoted by “high minded idiots”, rather they point to the model of Citizenship teaching in New Zealand in which the aim of social literacy and the exploration of social values are at the centre of the curriculum.

Heater (2001) suggests that previous failure to establish Citizenship in the curriculum has had political, social and pedagogy causes and that The Crick Report has failed to adequately address these problems. Perhaps the greatest of these obstacles to the development of Citizenship education is the failure of The Crick Report to either acknowledge or address the social divisions that exist in British society and which are reinforced by an education system that is divided between and a private and state sector, and a state sector which is then divided by selection. For Heater, Citizenship pedagogy must acknowledge that the subject can not be neutral and that its application must either challenge or reinforce the social reality of class division. Again this
critique owes more to the approach of Freire than Crick in that it begins with an examination of the social reality and acknowledges that teaching must either be progressive or reactionary in character.

Menter and Walker (2000) began their examination of Crick by placing it within the context of Government attitudes to education. They doubt that a new pedagogy of criticism can be developed under a Government which is seeking to exert greater control and management of education. They conclude that in Crick and other official thinking on Citizenship;

“There is insufficient acknowledgement of the inequalities and injustices which prevail in society;

current models are not based on dynamic concepts of culture and curriculum;

insufficient heed is paid to the perspectives and experiences of young people;

there is a failure to recognise that well-educated young citizens may be those who challenge the status quo in order to bring about radical change;

there is a lack of adequate recognition of global or even European dimensions of Citizenship.” (Menter and Walker 2000:113)

Both Starkey(2000) and Osler (2000) offer a rights based approach to the development of Citizenship teaching. They both consider this to be a far sounder foundation for the subject than that offered by The Crick Report in which an explicit commitment to a human rights agenda has been omitted. This omission of references to either the European Convention on Human Rights or the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is systemic rather than an oversight. While both of these human rights conventions may be taught in Crick’s Curriculum they do not guide its development or ethos as
This would strengthen the emphasis on rights and taking action at the expense of Crick’s emphasis on duty and responsibility.

This critique of Crick has continued not only into his Report but into its implementation. Leighton (2004) is concerned that there has been very little discussion in schools about the meaning and nature of Citizenship. This lack of a questioning approach to implementation of Citizenship in the curriculum has then allowed it to be, “offered within a framework of established order to encourage more participation in the system rather than to question it” (p168). He is also critical of the lack of student participation in the development of the curriculum saying, “Those who promulgate participation have not asked the young why they do not participate”.

Citizenship and multiculturalism

While multiculturalism is not mentioned explicitly by Freire, the anti-imperialist, anti-racist, student centred approach in his pedagogy is one which encourages a multicultural approach to education. In the culturally diverse environment that exists in London’s schools a multicultural approach to education is essential to making education inclusive and in assisting students to overcome cultural barriers to education. Osler is highly critical of Crick’s understanding of multiculturalism. For her The Crick Report;

“Contains, albeit unwittingly, an example of institutionalised racism, in its characterisation of minorities as people who are, by implication, less likely to adhere to the laws, codes and conventions of our society than majorities...[this judgement]...appears so embedded in the minds of those who prepared the report that their own stereotypes go
unquestioned and are accepted as objective reality... Even more worryingly, its assumptions, stereotypes and generalisations appear to have gone largely unchallenged in the wider education community”. (Osler 2000:33)

Without a multicultural pedagogy Citizenship will fail to develop the political literacy of students. This is an area where Freire’s view that a teacher must never stop developing and learning is of critical importance as Citizenship teachers must develop their own critical consciousness to develop a multicultural pedagogy. Osler is clear that without a multicultural pedagogy Citizenship will fail to develop the hoped for political literacy. She continues;

“If, as the Crick Report asserts, political literacy is an essential outcome of education for citizenship and democracy, then we need to expand the definition of political literacy to ensure that politically literate citizens are able to recognize and challenge racism.” (Osler 2000:35)

A Freirean application of political literacy Citizenship Curriculum

While the Citizenship curriculum examines political issues such as Local and National Government or various pieces of human rights law this does not of itself create political literacy in the Freirean sense. These subjects can be taught by what Freire calls an authoritarian or “banking” approach, in which the teacher’s authority over the creation of knowledge is not open to challenge or criticism. The Citizenship curriculum can be a medium through which skills of political literacy are developed in schools; however, the determining factor is how it is taught. Here we return to Arthur and Davison’s notion of a continuum from passive to active Citizenship teaching and to Freire’s concept of reactionary and progressive teachers. It is only at the active/progressive end of this continuum, through a teaching that
promotes a culture of social literacy rather than just knowledge of political institutions, that political literacy in the Freirean sense will be developed.

The practical application of this approach to political literacy is one in which a sense of agency is developed amongst the students. This should be developed in the school as a whole as well as in the Citizenship classroom. The development of school councils in which students feel ownership and control of the council and have access to the decision making forums of the school can develop both the sense of agency and with it political literacy. In this way students develop an understanding of how action can lead to change and that they have been the agents of that change.

In the classroom the development of knowledge should flow from action to skills to knowledge. In this way the narrative or banking approach is inverted and the teacher becomes a facilitator of education rather than the depositor of knowledge. The concept of agency can be developed by examining issues which students see as significant to their community (local, national and international) and then initiating action to influence these events. Thus the student, as an agent of change, develops the skills of political literacy as well as understanding of the significance of the institutions involved in this process. Reflection is also a vital element of this learning model. Students should be encouraged to reflect on not only what they have learnt but on the skills that they have developed by this learning. This metacognition can be developed through self assessment and peer assessment. In this Freirean model, political literacy is derived from a learning process in which the dialectic relationship between action and reflection lead to the creation of knowledge.

Conclusion
Just as Freire demands competency from a progressive teacher so we must develop the competency of the delivery of active / progressive Citizenship teaching. In this way the active pedagogy of criticism and political literacy can begin to impact on the culture of schools and teaching throughout the curriculum. Many of the contemporary criticism of *The Crick Report* develop the pedagogy of Paulo Freire. However, they do not suggest replicating the Literacy Training Movement that Freire developed in Sao Paulo, rather they promote the progressive methods that were involved in this movement. This progressive pedagogy sees education as a means to social change; not a change handed down from *The Crick Report*, but social change that is informed by Freire’s sense of social and political literacy.
Bibliography


