

## Using Language and Culture to teach a Core Subject 5.7.18

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### Slide 1

Using language and culture to teach a core subject brings me to the fundamental question of what education is for. My short presentation will give you a flavour of the conversations I am having with my supplementary school partners in MEaP (Making Education a Priority) which overlap nicely with some of the themes from my latest book that I am writing. I hope that we can continue this discussion today.....

So for brevity, I'm going to consider just two functions – education for employment and education for self-development and social knowledge

### Slide 2

Education for employment

If we take the job market preparation role of education, then what we are saying is that learning needs to be tailored for the jobs available in the market. So, learning becomes commodified and gains its value from how much profit it can generate (via economic productivity). This means that self-development is obviously not as important as contributing to national productivity and GDP. Education in this context becomes all about training people to become cogs in a wheel of the market. If we accept that capitalism was founded by race and its extracted labour then, in this model, we are saying that education is essentially about upholding the status quo. Education in this context is then about the 'unthinking'

application of skills learned through the education system that the worker can apply in order to maximise efficiency of their units of work. So, education can be seen to facilitate better ways for the corporatists to extract maximum surplus labour from their workers. In an ever-deregulated market where workers' rights are growing less protected, this is a worrying but longstanding trend. In manufacturing or highly skilled manual jobs, this is more apparent with more job closures and transfers of labour to cheaper markets. But in the service industry and knowledge economy to where more of our education is directed, this equivalent erosion can be observed with the rise of zero hour contracts and portfolio (freelance) working, sometimes known as the 'gig economy'.

So we can see in this model of education that it is important for the existence of the market that we educate people with the ability to serve the market's interests and in so doing become consumers who can further serve the market. This means that via becoming a consumer, promoting individual gain becomes an important role for education.

So what does this mean for ethnic minorities? If again we keep in mind that capitalism was built on the maximum extraction of surplus labour made possible through slavery and later colonialism, then the template for this modus operandi has already been set. Ethnic minorities and the white working classes have been set to occupy the lowest jobs in the market because more surplus labour can be extracted from them. But the 'common sense' education that has been promoted to the white working classes has been to indoctrinate them to believe that although they are lowly in the market hierarchy, they are still higher up than ethnic minorities and therefore more inherently deserving of market favour. So when in 2011, the Department of Education stated

**Education for economic well-being** and financial capability aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills and attributes to make the most of changing opportunities in learning and work. Through their learning and experiences inside and outside school, students begin to understand the nature of the world of work, the diversity and function of business, and its contribution to national prosperity. They develop as questioning and **informed consumers** and learn to manage their money and finances effectively. (p. 3)

(NB 'common sense' linkage between personal wellbeing and the economy embodied by informed consumers. Needs to be challenged)

The DfE is openly admitting their role in teaching young people to reproduce the social inequalities of the market through becoming "informed consumers".

### **Slide 3**

Education for self-development and social knowledge  
(co)production

The central question here is that within our present capitalist system; what does self-development mean? Does it mean developing the self in order to better navigate the market? If so, then this is no different to education for employment, obviously. But, if education is about liberation and social knowledge, this poses other questions. For example, if social knowledge is not valued in the market because the only currency of knowledge is market knowledge, then what is its purpose? It can and indeed should be argued that social knowledge exists outside of the market whether or not it is suppressed or ignored. This is true especially in a community context. But I am making the massive assumption that the market and its participation is all we have. But is it? I would argue that on a global level in terms of our financial institutions perhaps this is the case but on local levels

there are opportunities for communities to develop bespoke systems of cooperative economies. So, here being taught about the production of social knowledge is about a form of envisioning a future and an alternative to our present market paradigm.

In this context, self-development and social knowledge are two important arms of the envisioning process. Education for self-development could be described as being taught about our 'situated' place within the system. This would entail being taught about the operation of the market. On a curriculum level, this would perhaps look like learning about "connected histories", learning about the way institutions work, learning about how democracies are formed. Much of this already exists in the Citizenship GCSE, which has been deprioritised in the national curriculum. However, these points of learning are only symptomatic of deep-rooted systemic thinking. What I mean here is that the market already embodies social inequality, as it was constructed on social inequality. What this really means is that we need to challenge 'common sense' ideology of the status quo but this is difficult when everything around you is screaming the contrary and paints you as the problem for challenging assumptions. But challenging assumptions around race and gender and how racial patriarchy was formed into a racial rule and crystallised in to an invisible racial contract will become very important.

So how would we actually go about doing this? It could be argued that these challenges have to come directly from within our ancestral histories and traditions. This is why supplementary schools are so important. They are able to provide spaces that exist outside of the mainstream education system. Supplementary schools have the ability to coproduce social knowledge that is native to their communities. Teaching their children about their native languages, culture and histories is an

important radical act for supplementary schools because this act alone challenges the market at large, which is determined to erase this knowledge from its actors. A quick example of this would be a young African diaspora woman told that wearing her natural hair in a hairstyle representative of her traditional culture is then deemed unprofessional for the office she works in. So supplementary schools have the power to create spaces that exist outside of the market space of Eurocentric whiteness and its conformity. So within this model of radical education, just being taught about one's heritage, as radical as it is, alone, would not be quite enough. The next step would be using this social knowledge as a starting point to begin to problematize native racial patriarchies within these native traditions. This is important because if these native lines of oppression are not challenged then we run the risk of reproducing the very same oppressions that we are trying to remove our children from in our own schools and communities.

So, this idea of a radical education that challenges native forms of racial patriarchy is crucial for truly equipping our young people with the knowledge to see (through) the dominant ideology of the market. This knowledge gives our young people the opportunities to "dream" of alternatives to the market from but from their native traditions. So the radical nature of supplementary education is not just about learning about one's history, culture and language, it should be also be about learning how to envision a future with social justice at the core from one's own historical traditions.

## Slide 4

### Making Education a Priority and Ubuntu

In the schools I work with in the MEaP consortium, we are having these very same conversations. We are looking at ways of making our schools more sustainable and are looking at other governance models that will bring us closer together. We found that Ubuntu as an African Philosophy of Education that is built on communitarian values of social justice is a unifying pedagogy across our African and Caribbean led schools. Ubuntu is about exploring the balance between the rights of the individual and their responsibilities to their communities and vice versa.

The key overarching areas of Ubuntu are ethno-philosophy and critical philosophy. Ethno-philosophy aims to foreground our native sayings, metaphors, poetry and songs, as a way of extracting home wisdoms. When we look at our cultural components with a critical eye we can begin to draw out the common truths that are present in our cultural practices. Once we have uncovered our native knowledge, we then apply critical philosophy to look at reflecting on and evaluating this knowledge. Using questions such as; how is this knowledge useful for my self-development and for the development of my community? What new knowledge or ways of seeing the world do we gain from our cultural practices that we don't get from the mainstream culture around us? Are there harmful beliefs embedded within some of our cultural practices? How do we change them but on our terms?

Our focus on social justice is divided into 3 Ubuntu categories:

**Moral Justice** – pursuing equality, freedom and inclusion

**Compassionate justice** – recognising and acknowledging ours and others' vulnerabilities

**Restorative Justice** - honestly looking at how hurts can be healed. What steps need to be taken to achieve this?

We are working to try to embed this approach and ethos across the subjects we teach.

## Slide 5

Back in the market.....

However, in reality, our young people will still need to work in the market and I have often asked, will this 'awakened' knowledge of the system be of any actual use to them? This is an obvious dilemma to which there are no real answers. However, what this approach will do will be to decentralise Eurocentric knowledge-centres or whiteness from the psyche of our children. It is important to remember that education is about shaping the internal landscape of the citizen to accept the dominant ideology as 'common sense', meaning that challenge is not even thought about. If we can create knowledge systems in our communities that are sites for producing a social knowledge that our children can use to help them keep a sense of who they are upon entry into the market, this will be, in time, destabilising to the market, as other alternative ways of thinking and doing will grow organically.

This is perhaps mainstream education's prime worry, especially the elite and the system's gatekeepers and is why education is so closely policed by the state because it is THE principal method by which a state can control and indoctrinate its citizens into its



ways. The dangers we face as community educators is that what we teach can easily be defined as subversive in terms of being a danger to the state. In our present market system our social knowledge can easily be re-purposed to be seen as being dangerous, simply by attaching a 'war on terror' "signifier" to it. So, the system will inevitably push back with even stronger narratives of fear of our social knowledge and will seek to limit our civil liberties for teaching a curriculum outside of its control. Seen in this light education becomes very much an issue of the human right of self-determination which begins on the psychic level but it will be exactly this level that will be attacked first. In our consultation feedback for the government's Integrated Communities green paper, we raised these issues and offered suggestions of how we could be seen as less of a threat, whilst we went about our business in the community.

But let me tell you this....We will need to gird our loins and be prepared for the push back that is coming....So I hope we'll be able to continue this discussion later.

Thank you.



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