INTERACT
WP 14 Teachers as transformative intellectuals

Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights Education, University of Leeds
Institute of Education, University of London

The aim of WP14 is to analyse the interviews we conducted with teachers to determine the extent to which they perceive themselves to have a role as 'transformative intellectuals'. The term, coined by Giroux (1988, 1993), places teachers as professionals who have the disposition and the skill to engage critically with social realities. They should have a capacity for self-reflection and for conscious action directed at ending social inequalities. The term echoes Giroux's adoption of the Freirian view of transformation as a process that results from the interplay between action and critical analysis. The subjects of this critical analysis are, according to Freire, the social environment and the self.

The adoption of a critical stance by the teacher presupposes the understanding of reality 'as a *process*, undergoing constant transformation' (Freire, 1970, p. 56; emphasis in original). This approach to reality should be accompanied by and lead towards conscious participation in the process of its transformation for the establishment of a just society (Freire, 1970, 1994). This process of conscious participation is conceptualised by Freire through the Gramscian concept of *praxis*. Freire defines this as the process of 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (Freire, 1970, p.33).

Starting from this theoretical perspective, we examined teachers' views on how they understand and construct their professional responsibility for the development of similar skills and the cultivation of relevant attitudes in their students. We analysed the transcripts under four headings.
   a) Teaching as a politically charged activity that aims at the creation of a just (and inclusive) multicultural society.
   b) Teaching as promoting students' ability to critically evaluate their social conditions and engage in self-reflection.
   c) Teaching as a process that stems from and leads to self-reflection and cultivates students' ability for self-reflection
   d) Teaching as a path to Praxis

a) Teaching (in general and of Citizenship Education in particular) as a politically charged activity that aims at the creation of a just (and inclusive) multicultural society.

The analysis of interviews' data shows that for the teachers in our sample citizenship education is intended to create those conditions that support the establishment of a just and inclusive society. The teachers agree on the need for societal change and on the significant role that citizenship education can play. This view is expressed by all of them regardless of the level of their involvement in the political processes or of the ways that they choose to perform their roles as citizens (see summary of UK WP12). The interviewees tend to recognise the importance of human rights as the framework that should inform their aims and guide their practice. However, there are significant variations in the level of teachers' familiarity with this framework and in their understanding of what the application of such framework entails.

All teachers' responses indicate that their expectation of citizenship education is that it has a strong political element. Some of them state that their professional role (as citizenship educators and as teachers in general) is effectively an expression of their political stance (see WP12). However, a significant percentage of the teachers in our sample were reluctant to present or to view teaching as a political activity. These teachers were sceptical about their role as political educators although they confidently recognised the potential impact of their teaching in the development of students' political socialisation.

b) Teachers as promoters of students' ability to critically evaluate social conditions and engage in self-reflection.

Teachers in our sample acknowledge their role in helping students to critically examine social conditions at local, national and international levels. They wish to support students in recognising that there are multiple standpoints from which social reality can be viewed and in promoting a view of society as dynamic. Furthermore, they recognise that citizenship education can lead to the development of students' critical skills. Finally they consider the evaluation of social reality as one of the main responsibilities of the citizenship educator and as a core element of the subject.

However, in some of their responses, teachers have specific expectations regarding the outcome of the process of critical evaluation of social reality. They expect students to recognise and reject forms of injustice that they themselves consider as important. In that respect their approach towards the process of critical evaluation does not seem to be an open-ended one but one with predefined outcomes. There are indications in the interviews that such approaches bear the risk of promoting the classroom as a place that may be unable to accommodate viewpoints that do not fit with teachers' expectations.

   c) Teaching as a process which stems from and leads to self-reflection and cultivates students' ability for self-reflection.

The cultivation of students' ability to empathise with others and to view social conditions from different standpoints is closely related to the development of the skills of self-evaluation and self-reflection. The interviews contain plenty of indirect and some direct references to the development of these abilities. For most of the interviewees, citizenship education should respond to '*the challenge of students' views'*. They prioritise the development of students' understanding of the extent of their personal responsibilities in the reproduction of stereotypes and of social injustices at local, national and international levels.

The majority of teachers point out that their attempts to cultivate students' ability to think critically and adopt an empathetic view of society meet resistance produced by the embedded beliefs and uncritical adoption of values promoted by students' families or by their social and cultural groups. In that respect, these teachers describe their professional role as one that provides opportunities for students to see beyond the limits of their direct environment and adopt a more open, inclusive and tolerant approach towards all forms of diversity within their societies.
Teachers often portray family value systems and the role of culture in the construction of students' perspectives rather negatively. Some describe students' home cultures as an obstacle to multiculturalism. As one teacher suggests: '*we will have reached a multicultural society when we stop talking about being a multicultural society'*. Their approach to multiculturalism is more about expanding horizons and '*breaking down the barriers'*. On the other hand, teachers recognise that there are

limited opportunities in class for the promotion of students' cultural identities. In that respect their teaching seems to do little in motivating students to engage in an inward-looking process where culture appears as a basic constituent of identity; students are encouraged to find their citizenship by looking *beyond* their cultural identity rather than to construct it *through* this identity.

There is rather limited evidence of self-reflection by the teachers. The questions in the interview schedule offered the opportunity to them to reflect on the level of their engagement with politics. Some describe themselves as being politically inactive. These teachers acknowledged a discrepancy between their own citizenship engagement and their teaching about the importance of active participation. They expressed their wish to engage more actively in the political processes. However, there is little evidence that the process of self-reflection touches other aspects of teachers' professional or citizenship identity.

d) Teaching as a path to Praxis (conscious action following and followed by self-reflection and critical evaluation of social conditions)

It is quite clear from the vast majority of teachers' responses that teaching for them is closely linked to students' empowerment. Their attempts to promote the view of social reality as dynamic and constantly evolving is intended to motivate students to participate actively in the formation of an open, just and inclusive society. However, these clearly stated views are not always supported by the school environment. In many schools there are only limited possibilities for students' meaningful active participation. Teachers' expectations are partly determined by the level of participation that students enjoy in their school. Teachers from schools with an active students' council expect greater student involvement than their colleagues from schools in which students' participation is limited.

Regarding the long-term effect of their teaching, most teachers seem to be largely pessimistic or at least sceptical about its effectiveness in developing engaged citizenship among their students. Despite holding a view about teaching as a process with significant effect on students' development, teachers expect that the impact of their role as transformative intellectuals will be challenged by the social environment which students will experience as soon as they finish school. Comments to this effect are more likely to be made when referring to students from ethnic minorities. Such views could be interpreted as the result of a realistic recognition of the exclusionary practices applied within the social environment of modern Britain. Alternatively this may be seen as indicative of a view of the school as a system operating exclusively within social conditions that education is unable to challenge effectively.

References

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