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# **Conundrums of our own making: Critical Pedagogy and trainee further education teachers**

**Draft - working paper**

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This paper is the first of three that examine the experiences and understandings of a group of full time Further Education trainee teachers located in a new university in the English midlands <sup>(1)</sup>. The paper seeks to place the research within its socio-economic and discursive context as well as drawing out parallels with earlier work on FE trainee teachers. The main thrust of the paper is concerned with constructions of critical pedagogy and learning and examines the relation of trainees to such constructions.

## **Conundrums of our own making - critical pedagogy and FE trainee teachers**

This paper examines the experiences and understandings of a group of full time trainee FE teachers studying in a new university in the midlands. It is the first of a set of three interrelated papers, each of which address their experiences from a slightly different focus <sup>(1)</sup>. This particular paper places the research in its socio-economic and research context as well as examining student orientations towards critical pedagogy. The remaining papers in the symposium explore trainee understandings of literacy, drawing upon feminism and post-structuralism, with the third adopting a biographical approach.

Our findings are based upon a series of focus group discussions with the students followed up by a series of in-depth individual interviews. A questionnaire was also used to seek information on the background and experience of the trainees.

Our present work builds upon previous research (see Avis, et al, 2002a, 2002b; Bathmaker, et al, 2000; Parsons, et al, 2001) and seeks to both explore new areas and to see if their understandings have been affected by the significant curricular changes,

for example the development of advanced vocational qualifications (AVCEs), Individual learning plans, impacting on FE at this time.

## Context

Much of the literature in the field has explored the parameters and contradictions of the competitiveness education settlement (see for example, Avis, 1998, 2002), one which claims that by developing the knowledge and skills of the work force a vibrant and dynamic economy will be created able to compete successfully in world markets (see Wolf, 2002). Allied to these arguments are those that unproblematically link the development of competitiveness with aspirations to create a society marked by social cohesion and inclusion. Education plays a pivotal role in this project as it is charged to develop the forms of value-added labour required by the economic system. The development of such labour power arises through the formation of human capital, with education providing the knowledge and skills essential to the economy. However, this process is rather more rhetorical than real. Rikowski (2001) has usefully explored the contradictions and equivocations that surround employers definition of skill requirements. More importantly, and for those arguments that dwell upon the need for life long learning, is the suggestion that value-added labour power will arise through the development of dispositions that enable the learner to learn and labour. In other words the learner/worker is enabled to re-invent themselves to meet the vagaries of the capitalist labour market and so is able to sustain employability. Two points need to be made. Firstly, the capacity to labour is individualised, with the individual acquiring the knowledge skills and dispositions to labour. However, in the case of creativity this is set within a particular framework, one that aligns with the needs of capital and therefore operates on a specific terrain. The acquisition of key skills is part of the process through which intending workers develop habits that equip them for work. Secondly, even in the case of social capital, a conceptual framework that draws upon collective social networks and relations of trust, there nevertheless remains a tendency towards individualisation. That is to say the individual *qua* individual needs to acquire the ability to network and to labour with others in relations of trust so as to enhance productivity. The model of collectivity that underpins such conceptualisations of social capital is one that sees collectivity as arising from a combination of atomised individuals who, through the development of relations of trust, reduce the cost of production (see Avis, 2002; Barons, *et al*, 2000). This tendency towards a deepening individualisation is reflected in the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) concern; "to raise participation and attainment through high-quality education and training which puts *the learner first*" [my emphasis] (2001, unnumbered). The LSC is responsible for funding and planning of post compulsory education and training in England. The emphasis upon learners is related to the development of individualised learning plans and is linked to the use of information communication technology (ICT) to facilitate learning. Beck writes

Let us be clear what 'individualization' means. It does *not* mean individuation - how to become a unique person. It is *not* Thatcherism, not market individualism, not atomisation. On the contrary individualization is a *structural* concept, related to the welfare state; it means '*institutionalized* individualism'. Most of the rights and entitlements of the welfare state for example, are designed for individuals ... people are invited to constitute themselves as

individuals: to plan, understand, design themselves as individuals and, should they fail, to blame themselves. (Beck, 1999, p 9)

The consequence of individualisation is that structural relations become silenced. Beck's comment on individualisation reflect many of the arguments surrounding educational processes and the development of meritocracy in the post war period. However, over the last two or three decades the salience of class relations has lessened, or more correctly these have been re-organised so as to obscure their collective basis and become experienced in individualised ways. This legitimates the focus upon the individual learner and is compounded by the psychologisation of pedagogic relations (Zukas and Malcom, 1999).

Stress upon the individual is partly reflected in the pedagogic context in which learners and lecturers labour as well as the socio-economic context. In relation to post compulsory education the raft of quality procedures and the construction of the curriculum emphasise the individual learner as a unit of analysis. The state's pre-occupation with raising standards has resulted in the formulation of targets and a concern with measurable outputs that rests well with the specification of learning outcomes surrounding particular areas of learning. The success of an individual learner can be readily assessed against measurable learning outcomes that themselves have been benchmarked. Processes such as these reflect the emphasis placed upon performance management which embody appraisal, the development of targets which can then be used to assess and motivate the performance of the individual lecturer.

The preceding discussion briefly sets the socio-economic and educative context that our trainees confront, indicating the prioritisation accorded to economic imperatives, the focus upon individual learners, as well as the tendency towards prescribed learning outcomes. However, such a context needs to be related to discursive constructions of teaching and learning that inform understandings of educative processes. These discursive understandings derive from a number of sources - the lived experience of educative processes, hegemonic conceptions of teaching and learning that underpin the competitiveness settlement, as well as those pedagogic constructions surrounding the teacher training course.

### *Discursive context*

This section draws attention to a number of thematic and discursive concerns that serve to contextualise our findings. Performance management, league tables and the pursuit of measurable outcomes which can then be used as indicators of improving educational standards are ubiquitous across all education sectors, with learners being tested and teachers being assessed at regular intervals. Such testing not only serves to regulate and surveil teacher practice but also to review and record learner levels of skill and understanding. So for example, when leaving primary school the learner should have acquired functional levels of numeracy and literacy. Behind systems of testing and learner development rest particular assumptions about the nature of learning. Some of these will be rooted in particular disciplines and resulting subject cultures. Within maths, science and language there exist developmental and staged models of learning (Shayer and Adey, 1981). Before the learner is in a position to move to a higher level of learning they will need to have satisfactorily completed and understood the preceding level (Ball, 1981). Somervell (in progress) has illustrated

the way in which students in higher education similarly operated with a staged and developmental model of learning. Although we can argue about the complexity, efficacy or generality of such models they do provide an overarching curricular framework that rests easily with commonsense understandings. Within the primary sector for example, the notion of readiness plays an important role in determining whether an individual is prepared to move to the next more difficulty level of learning (Steedman, 1987). Such common sense ideas exist easily alongside maturational and individualised models of learning. Readiness is easily conflated with confidence, and sits comfortably with a staged model of learning that moves towards more complex and equivocal understandings. Bernstein captures such understanding in his rye suggestion that:

The ultimate mystery of the subject [discipline] is revealed very late in their educational life. By the ultimate mystery of the subject, I mean its potential for creating new realities. It is also the case, and this is important, that the ultimate mystery of the subject is not coherence, but incoherence: not order but disorder, not the known but the unknown. As this mystery is revealed very late in the educational life... only the few experience in their bones the notion that knowledge is permeable, that its orderings are provisional, that the dialectic of knowledge is closure and openness. *For the many, socialisation into knowledge is socialisation into order, the existing order, into the experience that the world's educational knowledge is impermeable.* [my emphasis] (Bernstein, 1977, 97-98)

In spite of the attraction of post-modern conceptualisations of learning which emphasise openness and the provisionality of educational knowledge, this is undermined by the performative context in which learning takes place. This context is characterised by the prevalence of learning outcomes which have an affinity with staged and developmental models of learning (see Ecclestone, 2002). Such models suggest that prior to critique the learner needs to acquire the basic building blocks upon which disciplines are developed. Such conceptualisation can be applied to school experience and can be used to consider the type of developmental model that underpins the shift from GCSE to AS level and on to A2. In relation to the construction of degree programmes similar staged and developmental models can be seen, as described in Somervell's work. For example, as the learner moves from level one through to level three the amount of critique and critical analysis is further developed. At level one a purely descriptive account may be satisfactory, whereas at level three elements of critique and independent thought will be sought, which will be pushed still further in post graduate studies. It may be suggested that the preceding constructions are overly blunt and stereotypical. However, for the purpose of this paper the section seeks merely to highlight the discursive context in which our trainees work, one that traverses a range of educational sectors and which provides a commonsense framework which even if questioned provides a hegemonic discursive context. In addition such constructions are mirrored in our trainees' training programme where they encounter hierachal and staged models of learning. Paradoxically many of these models remove the learner from the context of learning by dwelling upon the individuals psychological dispositions towards learning and learning styles (see Zukas and Malcom, 1999). The resulting psychologisation of

learning removes the learner from the social and relational context in which learning takes place leading to the type of individualisation that Beck (1999) discusses.

### *Research context*

In earlier papers we examined a previous cohort of trainee FE teachers' understanding of pedagogic relations, both in relation to their students and the staff with whom they worked. We found it useful to interpret their accounts by drawing upon a number of themes: the discourse of the good and bad student, one mirrored in constructions of the good and bad lecturer. We also examined their understanding of the context surrounding post compulsory education and training, as well as a tendency towards the technicisation of teaching (see Avis, *et al*, 2002a, 2002b; Bathmaker, *et al*, 2000; Parsons, *et al*, 2001). Although this earlier cohort exhibited an ethic of care this was in contradiction with the way in which they understood, and made sense of, their own difficulties with students. In this instance their accounts were similar to those they attributed to the 'bad' lecturer, in as much as students were construed as not wishing to be in the classroom or to learn, and were characterised by a pathological approach to learning.

### *Continuities*

In this section, against the background of the changing world of FE, we point towards the similarities in the response gained from both cohorts. In our previous work we examined the discursive construction of students and lecturers, finding them reflected in the current research. The good lecturer was contrasted with the bad. The good lecturer had time for students, was supportive of them and appeared to care. One of our trainees commented:

Caring is something you have. Empathy is something you should have.  
It's professional to have empathy for your students. If you lose that  
empathy then you just become an unprofessional teacher.

Another trainee, Robert, reflecting on when he himself was a student, emphasised the element of care in the contrast he drew between a lecturer he felt had let students down and one who cared, and upon whom he would like to model himself:

He's wrecking our education, he's not teaching us he is disappearing,  
we're coming in for our lessons and he is in Europe somewhere making  
a television commercial, he's not here an' we've had enough now and  
we want to be taught properly by people who want to teach... but the  
tutor that took over from him, to just get us through the rest of this  
course, was such a great guy. He got emotional when we were working  
on a big production because something went wrong and he was upset  
for us because he felt he had let us down and I suddenly thought, that's  
the kind of guy I would like to be like, I'd like to feel I could care  
about people and what they do with their lives to the point that if I feel  
it's not going right I'm letting them down

In one of the focus groups a trainee was very critical of the students who attended his placement college, but was full of admiration for the teachers who worked with them.

The staff in my college are wonderful, it's just the kids I'd like to get rid of. [Describes the college as the one where students go if they can't get in anywhere else.] a particularly nasty college ... the last of the dregs college. The students are vile generally, but the staff are the nicest people, considering what they have to deal with, they've got such a good attitude. They're so positive and upbeat. It would get me down. I'm not sure I could work there and stay sane, and not become really miserable and fed up. It's a constant battle with the students, telling them off.

And who during the focus group discussion added:

What I am saying is that the majority of the students who come there couldn't get into the other colleges or had been kicked out of them. So they come to this college. You could imagine that the staff would treat them like the dregs, but they don't. They are very positive and upbeat. They treat the kids well and have got time for the students.

These comments resonate with trainees' constructions of the good and bad student, reflecting an almost pathological description of failing and disaffected students. They also reflect the difficulties that some lecturers have with their students which may be compounded by the institutional and material conditions in which they work and that may lead to a loss of morale and a seeping away of the ethic of care. However in the construction of the good lecturer alongside a concern with care rests an enthusiasm and commitment to teaching. Here is Noreen's description of an inspirational lecturer;

She was so full of enthusiasm it was just incredible. You guaranteed everybody would turn up to her lectures. Not only was she enthusiastic about her own subject but she made sure it will rub off on you. Well it did to me. But a lot of people went on to university and a lot of them did take marketing, because of the way she taught it.

These accounts can be contrasted with the construction of the bad lecturer who was viewed as uncaring, distant from the needs and interests of learners and who ultimately placed no value on students. From the focus group discussion a number of comments emerged:

It was a shock to the system, because I always thought you had respect for the students, and it was mutual respect. When I overheard what some of the teachers were saying to the students it was virtually 'you're stupid'.

A trainee mentioned low expectations of students and the negative attitudes expressed in the staff room. Another mentioned her frustration with the teachers she encountered in her placement.

The unprofessional people who are allowed to teach is absolutely diabolical. They don't care about the students, they don't care about their colleagues, they don't care about their work, they just want the

holidays, I think its diabolical. I care about the kids, that is the only thing that keeps me going.

However, as with the earlier cohort, trainee attitudes towards students in part reflected those of the bad lecturer. For trainees, bad students were viewed as those who rarely attended, had no interest in their studies and would do the minimum, attending college for their social life or to be marked on a register so that they could get their maintenance allowance (Haddon, 1983). Anna who taught GNVQ intermediate commented:

I have found that it would have probably been better or the same to have taught at school as it is to teach GNVQ intermediate. I don't enjoy it at all. I don't feel there is any reason for me to be there really, they'd be just as happy with an empty room and someone to sign their EMA [education maintenance allowance] papers at the end of the day, and actually it turns you into being quite demoralised really.

Echoing these concerns another trainee suggested:

But half the time you get stuck with a load of toe rags, who couldn't care less what day of the week it was, whether you're in the room or not. And it's very hard then when they can't respect you, for you to respect them. Where's the cut-off point?

The good student attended regularly, was interested and enthusiastic about the subject and could exercise some control over their own learning. Here is Noreen drawing a contrast between the students she encountered:

I teach both the intermediate and foundation in one group and the advanced in another. I did my degree two years ago. It is very difficult to come down so many levels because you are so used to learning the subject to a high level and coming right down is very difficult, but on top of which you really can tell the difference between the advanced and the intermediate and foundation. The difference is incredible. The intermediate, is like McGregor's X and Y theory, you have one set of students who will do the minimum and those are the foundation/intermediate - they will do the minimum. Then you have the other side of the coin which is the AVCE, where the students would do the maximum to achieve and they want to continue their learning. They really do, they are so enthusiastic.

In our earlier work we found that trainees tended to criticise lecturers for their lack of care in dealing with disaffected students, but that when they encountered difficult students they themselves drew upon a similar discursive framework to describe these encounters. In the preceding there are elements of these constructions. In contrast here is Robert discussing some of his more difficult students. We can glimpse his attempts to make sense of and empathise with these learners and so go beyond the discourse of the good and bad. To quote at length.

I've loved teaching them [AVCE] but there are obvious problems and issues with individual students that were difficult to deal with at times, I wasn't sure how to approach them because they were of varying levels of ability. I went in with the attitude that I understand where they are because I've been there myself... I like to think that I could identify with them but they do seem to be quite different, some of them have a very different attitude. I get the impression that some of them either aren't aware of the consequences of not doing the work or aren't bothered.

If their work is negatively received by the tutors and if they get a negative response from us they'll get down about it, but as soon as they are out of the office it's forgotten. I think some of them have had bad experiences of learning and have got low esteem. They consider themselves to be useless, stupid. I've actually heard one or two of them say these things and I've found myself asking why would a young person say that about themselves because I have never wanted them to think that and I've never called them that. One or two of them, their attitude is that, 'I'll make silly remarks in the lesson and get attention', but I try not to give them too much attention when they do that but I'm aware that they have got a problem ...

The other lecturers... they've moaned about it, the quality, the attitude of the students and they get frustrated with it and sometimes they struggle to reach the students and they don't know what to do with them. They're sort of thinking, we want them to learn, they've got these things they need to learn, they've got to create a portfolio, or they have to get an essay in, and the deadlines coming and then they go, and the students don't hand their work in. They are frustrated by the students lack of respect, or what's the word, punctuality about getting their work in on time.

### *Community of practice*

Turning to the trainees' understanding of the context in which they taught, some continuity can be found with our earlier work. Respondents often felt themselves to be at the margins, if not excluded from work-based communities of practice. At times their accounts intimated towards college processes which placed them in teaching situations where they felt marginalised or could do least 'damage'. Roger noted:

The head of department is always very supportive and I'll show him something and he'll knock it into shape, you've missed this bit out, you need to add this bit in...

Now I'm teaching a course on my own for which I've got sole responsibility. Due to a minor glitch I've got six students. A module that should have lasted them a full year, they did in six months. So there was one semester of timetabling that had to be filled to meet the prerequisite hours of the overall course. So I'd do an employability certificate and safety lifting certificate. I prepared a lot of information

for the employability certificate because that was what I was starting first. Only to find out two weeks into the course that we were not an approved centre ... After I'd already started this course it got pulled...

And Robert mentioned a similar process.

The unit that I was teaching when I started has one single summative assessment, an exam, that's not until the second year. So for two years they are not assessed officially...

I've been involved in a feedback session for the second year with the course leader and the unit that I was teaching came up. He actually said to the students you don't need to create any portfolio work for this course unit at all. It is not important so anything that you've done for that unit you can put into your other work... your other lesson. And I'm sat there thinking I don't agree with that. I think that's wrong, I didn't say anything to him. But I sat there thinking it, that's like kidding the students then because they're thinking, well we've been doing this and we've been doing that, but it wasn't important.

Both trainees commented on the supportive environment offered in their placement colleges. Although Roger felt part-time lecturers viewed him as potential competition for future employment. Nevertheless feelings of marginality were common. Sharon was the exception and comes closest to Lave and Wenger's (1999) model of a community of practice. She suggested that her contribution to teaching was both acknowledged and valued, with members of the teaching team drawing upon and using materials she had prepared.

The department is all women, I have a great time they are all really helpful and friendly, we all help one another, If I have a problem I just go and speak to the head of department and she's the course manager and she's great, really helpful. We all discuss things, work together, have a laugh. You know quite often I will prepare handouts of my lessons and others use them [laugh]. Yeah, we all help one another...

It seems that quite a lot of the stuff that I have prepared they've liked because they've used it, which I find is a complement because it has got to be reasonable if they are willing to teach it in their lessons... we were inspected before Easter and although I wasn't inspected my handouts were used in classes that were inspected and the basic skills provision got a 1 [top grade].

In addition because of her occupational specialism she possessed skills that members of her college lacked and became involved in their training in an aspect of her specialism.

I actually went back and taught them [a student group] for three consecutive weeks for my speciality. It made sense. I was also teaching the tutor and she also came on [a course], I actually ran a speciality course and she came along to that to learn a bit more. So I was actually

teaching a teacher my skills and what I had learned because I have done a lot, I have a lot of experience.

She illustrates mobility within a community of practice where at one moment the trainee is on the periphery and at another moves towards the centre, and established teachers, because they lack a particular skills, move away from the centre towards the periphery. However, Sharon was placed in a unique position.

*Administration;*

In the earlier work much was made of the hostility and refusal of existing lecturers to manage the administrative demands they faced.

As new professionals we need to encourage change. We're coming into it, we expect all the paperwork, we know what to expect. We have to do lesson plans, evaluation, paperwork, whereas they don't want to do the paperwork.

It is easier for us to change because we are not stuck in our ways.

Some trainees felt that because they expected a heavy administrative load that they would be able to handle the demands that were made of them in subsequent employment. Although similar criticisms were made of lecturers, for at least some trainees in the current study the issues of pay, work load and administrative demands, rather than being manageable, were facets of the lecturer role that dissuaded them from seeking full-time employment or became aspects of the job that seriously worried them (see Wilson, 2002). Mike commented:

All of the full time teachers that I have spoken to have been really unhappy with the workload, really stressed out and if they could find a way out of teaching they would. But they don't know how they can get out because there's such a decent rate of pay. I don't want to fall into that trap of having to teach full-time and be totally de-motivated and stressed. That frightens me.

From our questionnaire trainees described the role of the lecturer as being an "administrator, organiser, teacher, assessor, councillor - the role is endless, it's not just about the teaching" Another suggested the role was "Athletic! Unnecessarily stressful (i.e. unnecessary paperwork)" with another commenting that you "have to be superhuman, jump through lots of conflicting hoops - incredibly stressful + de-motivating." Another commented dryly, "paper pusher most of the time". The trainees in the current cohort were far less accepting of the administrative and bureaucratic demands that surrounded lecturing.

## Critical pedagogy

In the current research project we found ourselves reflecting upon the nature of learning and the pedagogic encounter. We found ourselves thinking about what a progressive educative experience would involve. All of the research team had experience of working in further education, a number of us had been involved with

access provision and found ourselves drawn ideologically towards dialogic models of teaching and learning. Zukas and Malcom (2002) describe such an orientation as deriving from the model of the adult educator and suggest:

Pedagogy is more than teaching and learning. We assume that it incorporates a critical understanding of the social, policy and institutional context, as well as a critical approach to the content and process of the educational/training transaction. (2002, p215)

At the same time our pedagogic positions were influenced by the work of Habermass on ideal speech situations, Lave and Wenger's (1999) work on communities of practice, as well as feminist and post structuralist writings (Anderson and Williams, 2001). When we examined trainee accounts we found ourselves seeking to interrogate these against a dialogic understanding of pedagogic processes (Carr, 1995). What do we mean by dialogic understandings? There are a number of elements that we draw upon to construct such a model. To begin with the curriculum and pedagogic experiences are construed as social constructions. Even in the case of the type of curriculum we discussed earlier, associated as it is with prescription and staged development, it is nevertheless socially produced outside as well as within the classroom. It should be noted that at classroom level the curriculum is enacted through a process of interaction. Through this process a particular ideational structure is created which constitutes the curriculum as immutable and received. Although we recognise there are sites of struggle and mediation within classroom practices such curricular seeks to minimise the impact of these through a tightly prescribed assessment regime.

The preceding notions draw upon the sociology of the curriculum and are not so far removed from Giddens concept of structuration - the idea that social structures are reproduced through the action of agents (see for example, Parker, 2000). The curriculum and resulting knowledge is socially produced. Dialogic models understand the pedagogic encounter as an attempt by lecturers and learners to construct understandings of the social world. This can be contrasted against those processes that seek to transmit and reproduce a received curriculum which is nevertheless socially produced. Whilst lecturers and learners will have differing experiences drawing upon the resources at their disposal in an attempt to frame and develop understanding. The educative struggle is one in which there are real attempts to make sense of and understand the social world. Such a dialogic model suggests that there are no pre-determined answers against which learner responses can be measured or benchmarked. Such a model is at odds with the forms of prescription that underpin learning outcome models and prescribed curriculum with the learner being directed to acquire particular understandings which are then used to assess learning (see Avis, 2000; Ecclestone, 1999, 2002). Models of critical pedagogy derive from the practices of educators, for example those who draw upon Habermassian and other forms of critical theory. Underpinning such approaches lie a commitment to social justice and learner empowerment. Such practices can operate within a range of pedagogic practices.

Feminism has been another current that has influenced our thinking. However the model of critical pedagogy that informs our discussion views the curriculum as socially produced and therefore embodies a number of social interests that need to be

deconstructed. In addition this model interprets the pedagogic process as one in which there is an attempt to understand and make sense of the social world. This is why a dialogic engagement is so important. However linked to this practice is a notion of social justice rooted in a political economy that recognises social antagonism and the presence of differential interests in curricular processes. We wanted to see if such an orientation was present amongst our trainee teachers.

### *Pedagogic processes*

In this section we draw upon trainees accounts of teaching. Here is Sharon commenting upon her excitement when students achieve.

With a student with very poor literacy skills in the B group. One lesson I was going through communication, recapping communication and I gave him a sheet with different categories and then a list of words in each of the categories. I put the first two letters of the word and he had to match them up. He worked through it and did the whole lot by himself and got it all right and he was also keeping half an ear on the conversation. They were talking about communication and somebody came up with the Morse code and he said, 'yeah you can use a mirror and you can do it with light as well'. It was a little comment and he was working on something completely different and then he could contribute to this conversation and so for me that was just a huge thing and I was just like Yeah! I was just buzzing when I came out of that lesson. Because it is a tiny thing, but for him it was a major thing. That doesn't normally happen and it is down to the students and there is nothing I can really do. It is when they come up with something, and that is what I like, a small two minute incident like that, 30 seconds that makes everything, and that is what you live for when you're teaching special needs

Her account seems very far from our construction of a dialogic practice and seems much closer to an analysis of learner experience in relation to skill acquisition. Her excitement was almost palpable when she recounted incidents where her learners had acquired skills or gained new insights. Roger who felt himself to be a practically orientated teacher described his ideal teaching situation in a conventional and almost technicised manner.

Register aims and objectives, it is all part of the structure you should be following and then I suppose I'd do a question and answer session about what they know, either the area that I'm teaching them or about the area that I'd previously taught them the other week and then I'd move on to the new area that I'm teaching and I'd hope to, depending on what the subject was, to be able to have a discussion with them and see what experiences they'd had around that particular new area and then I'd give them some information on that area, some formal information that could be via a handout or some other means, whether that be a presentation using PowerPoint, and give the students possibly an exercise for them to be able to grasp more information or to be able to get different information out of somewhere else, and for that to

move on to the situation when they would be doing their own research, coming back maybe half an hour later with more information on that area or split them up into groups and then coming to the end of the session, a recap to see what they've learned from that session and hopefully as they walk out the room they say we've enjoyed that, that was good.

On the other hand Robert who was involved in AS and A2 curricular was somewhat more equivocal in his account. Although he emphasised that the delivery of information was paramount, the need to provide students with the knowledge that underpinned their subject, at others he sought to provide a space where students could develop their own analysis.

I think that they need more assessment during the lesson. They need that kind of, that definite idea that something is going to happen during this learning [lesson] that we are going to test them. We are going to make sure that learning is working, that they are learning information and we are going to see how successful it has been. We need to find out if they are capable of going on to the next stage...

I try to give them an excuse to enjoy themselves, I don't want them to sit down and look at me. I want them to say he's the teacher. I want them to know that I'm the person giving them information. But I don't want them thinking, I can't move, I've only got to say what he wants me to say.

His concern with information or subject based knowledge co-existed alongside an interest in student creativity and sense making that seemed to approximate to a more dialogic understanding.

I'd like to make a lesson that was fun and that they would learn from by being able to enjoy it. I quite like the classroom environment and teaching them like that without being too practical. So I think I would like to reach them but give them lots of examples, and give them lots of tasks to do. To get them to understand the importance of the structure of the media industry, and give them lots of good examples that they could enjoy, television programmes, film clips of advertising, where they could really get involved in it and perhaps even create their own interpretation of something and then feed back, perhaps in a few weeks down the line of how they've done it and whether or not they've enjoyed it.

What do these brief examples have to say about the construction of progressive practice that informed our initial discussion of these issues? Michael Apple reminds us that:

[critical pedagogy] sometimes becomes a form of what best be called "romantic possibilitarian" rhetoric, in which the language of possibility substitutes for a consistent tactical analysis of what the balance of forces actually is and what is necessary to change it. (2001, p63-64)

Listening to our trainees' accounts of teaching we were struck by the equivocal relation of these to our idealisation of critical pedagogy. Many trainees had contradictory relations with students. Some were very accommodating and understanding towards student resistance and hesitancy to engage in the pedagogic encounter, others found themselves drawing upon pathological constructions of students. Here students were construed as being disaffected, uninterested and only attended college to gain maintenance allowances or to enhance their social life. Yet at the same time we caught glimpses of an ethic of care, a concern to empathise with students and to provide learners with a supportive environment through which they could 'grow'. However, for many trainees the context in which they laboured was less than satisfactory. We have already discussed disaffected students but there were also lecturers who were similarly disaffected. Such disaffection sat alongside our trainees concern with the administrative workload and an overloaded curriculum that precluded the forms of critical engagement that some sought to develop amongst their students.

I do not want to teach psychology if the curriculum's like this, because I don't want to go through 15 years of teaching something that's become mundane, and nobody's developing skills. They're just memorising...

I still read psychology books, I still find it fascinating, but unfortunately, teaching it is a different things. I'm not going to sit there and say to students, here's a theory, here's a study, here's the reason why, here's what may be wrong with the theory, here's what may be wrong with the study. Because I want them to tell me, I want to say, yes and let's look at it another way. Because that's not developing a love of the subject, that's just helping them to memorise it. I did this because I wanted that kind of thing I have about psychology, a tingling feeling, to be carried on through my teaching. It wasn't an ego thing, I know you can think of it like. I wanted them to, I'd always accepted there was going to be some students who wouldn't have liked it and that would have been fine and I would have helped them no matter what. Just how can I expect them to have a passion for it when time constraints don't allow for it. So it's not really the students' fault, it's a lot of things together and unfortunately they don't have time to develop a passion for it if they've got an exam in January. They have to make sure they know the pros and cons of a study and a theory and the advantages for and against. When are they meant to develop the skills?

This was the context which was set against our model of critical pedagogy. Some trainees such as Robert sought to develop their students' critical sensibilities in order that they could explore the social world. However, this was balanced against a concern to transmit the required information. The notion of the curriculum and knowledge as a social production was intimated at by this and other trainees, but was counter balanced by the desire to 'transmit' the appropriate subject information. How then should we respond to this situation? Are we guilty of Apple's "possibilitarian rhetoric", one that is inattentive to the very real constraints that surround practice? Or are we, like those we criticise, guilty of imposing a prescribed curriculum? Sharon, one of our trainees, was working with students who had learning difficulties, we

encountered her enthusiasm and commitment to her students. She gained a real 'buzz' from their achievements. Again her account seemed far from our construction of critical pedagogy, and what was significant was her quasi-individual model of learning that sought to empower her students and offer them self-respect and value. Perhaps after all we were operating with a conundrum of our own making.

However, it is not enough to emphasise an ethic of care, or a set of values that seeks to offer learners respect and dignity in the classroom, or even a concern with criticality. Education practices need to be underpinned by a notion of social justice that appreciates the pattern of social antagonism found within society. Such a standpoint requires us to think about the contexts within which educational processes are located. This in turn raises questions about the way in which wider social processes constitute learners, the curriculum and even the socio-economic context. The use of a "possibilitarian rhetoric" can sit with a politics of hope that legitimates struggle, a critical pedagogy moulded to the circumstances in which it is placed. Underpinning this practice lies a recognition of the politics of education and the ways these are inscribed in curricula categories which serve not only to engage with social difference but to actively produce these. Pedagogic encounters serve to constitute learners as particular types of students having specific and implied destinies. It is not enough to hold to an ethics of care or a concern to engage students, there is a wider politics inscribed in these practices and it is one that seeks to question the wider social structure that generates patterns of inequality. This brings us back to Zukas and Malcom's argument that pedagogy involves more than teaching and learning:

that it incorporates a critical understanding of the social, policy and institutional context, as well as a critical approach to the content and process of the educational/training transaction. (2002, p215)

## Notes

1. The three papers presented in the symposium:

*Conundrums of our own making - critical pedagogy and FE trainee teachers*, Avis, J., Bathmaker, A-M.., Kendall, A., Parsons, J.

*Stories about reading: new teachers constructions of reading and pedagogy*, Kendall, A., Avis, J., Bathmaker, A-M., Parsons, J.

*Biographies, values and practice: new lecturers constructions of teaching in FE*: Bathmaker, A-M.., Avis, J., Kendall, A., Parsons, J.

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