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Commissioned Research Article

Title: Citizenship education, truth and learning: some thoughts on professional deliberation

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**Citizenship education, truth and learning: some thoughts on professional deliberation**

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**Abstract**

Through consideration of a classroom context observed as part of a PGCE student teacher's professional development, reading as a learning activity is considered. It is proposed that 'learning to read' engages pupils in a critical social-cultural-political project. Through further analysis of a pupil response identified as 'wrong', learning in citizenship education is considered through the prism of realist and constructivist perspectives. Finally, current educational 'good practice' is identified as offering more than just 'things to do in the classroom'; aspects are shown to be concordant with elements of constructivist thinking, thinking which potentially offers professionals a prism through which to examine practise. In short, this paper does not propose that teachers 'become' constructivist in orientation; rather it offers, as an example, how adopting various theoretical positions from which to deconstruct education can and does provide for alternative perspectives both on educational policy and personal-professional viewpoints.

Some time ago I was fortunate enough to observe a PGCE student teach a citizenship lesson to a small group of mixed gender and supposedly 'low ability' year 10 pupils; it was one of a series of lessons designed to raise issues, pose questions and stimulate debate concerning drugs in sport. As a 'starter activity' the student asked the pupils to match four statements with one of four possible 'responses'. I think it fair to state that a reasonably well-informed person would probably be able to attach a response to its logical statement and that such logicality would seem to stem from, amongst other things: the words used; the interplay between them; and, commonly held beliefs and understanding about drugs and their relationship with sport. Probably there are a number of other aspects that enable a *shared* agreement to be held, but for the moment these will suffice. The agreed position - that is, the 'correct' pairing, can be seen in figure 1.

| Statement | 'Correct' response |
|---|---|
| Cheat | Someone who knowingly breaks the rules |
| Performance-enhancing | Something that makes you perform better |
| Drugs test | A procedure for checking if athletes have taken drugs |
| Steroid | A class of drugs that makes your strength increase |

Figure 1

As the pupils were working, it struck me that this activity although appearing simple is actually rather complex. For one thing, in order that they might complete the task the pupils needed to be able to read. Without delving too deeply into a discussion as to what 'reading' means, we might state simply that 'being able to read' consists of being able to decode and understand how ciphers fit together to produce a communication; put simply, the grasp of reading as the mastery of technique (c.f. Kearns and Doyle, 1991; Ravitch, 1991). However, for me this seems

overly-simple; for one thing, if this were the case, then why do people often take different meanings from the same text? Alternatively then, what 'being able to read' might entail is an understanding of the subtlety of written scripts in how they convey both overt messages such as 'here is a statement', 'here are a series of responses' and 'match them up' and covert messages that relate to, perhaps, relationships between pupil and teacher, pupil and task and appropriate responses. In this latter view the task is challenging because it is both demonstrative *and* representative of aspects of the culture in which it is expressed: in this sense the use of written linguistic forms carries with it messages about the *relative* importance of reading, the written word, its place in school, and so on. As Edelsky (1994) notes, in this interpretation reading is implicitly bound up with the hegemonic cultural metaphors of dominant groups.

This latter view (one to which I am drawn) I believe offers interesting insights into learning in citizenship education for two reasons which together form the purpose of this paper. Even though I wish to talk about learning in relation to citizenship education I am not proposing that such deliberations stop there. I am merely using the subject as a prism through which to examine some of the issues I feel it is vital to consider so that educators might begin to reflect on their practice and its relationship with pupil learning. Let us start.

**Citizenship education, reading and the text**

Firstly, I feel it wise to consider *very* briefly citizenship education and its relationship with the preceding discussion. To this end I propose that, for the purposes of this paper, we adopt the view that citizenship education is concerned with public policy and the preparation of young people for engagement in this arena (Huddleston and Rowe, 2003). It follows therefore that

citizenship education desires to influence positively young people's ability to understand how the formulation and workings of aspects of public life impinge upon and affect individual action (Adams, 2005). In support, the text which provided the very genesis of citizenship education in its present form, the Crick Report, articulates the kernel of citizenship education in such terms.

> For people to think of 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… (QCA, 1998: 7)

I think it clear therefore that if pupils are to develop the capacities alluded to above then the discourses (that is '…the language and substance of public deliberation' (Huddleston and Rowe, 2003: 118)) within which they are required to operate require, *at the very least*, consideration. Usefully, Huddleston and Rowe (2003) identify politics, the law, economics and ethics as encompassing disciplines which together form '…the basic content of teaching and learning in citizenship education' (*ibid*: 118,119).

Not only does this brief discussion identify a shared ground for citizenship education, it offers further opportunities to re-engage with the reading debate. Accepting, as I have proposed we do, that acts such as 'reading' are reified, in part due to their communicative function but more importantly (for this discussion at least) for the way in which the reading acts *positions* and is *positioned by* the reader in relation to the hegemonic messages conveyed through the text, it would seem curious therefore to ignore wider public dimensions when considering the reading act *as part of learning and teaching in the subject*. Such deliberations seem even more important for citizenship education when one considers that inherent within learning in the subject are classroom and other educational interactions which are themselves part of those public deliberations alluded to previously - public deliberations which impinge upon young people. Furthermore, as the activities presented and undertaken during citizenship education are part of the web of interaction defined by teacher beliefs, institutional norms (school ethos)

and wider educational and social policy, to ignore the ways in which acts such as reading attain their social-cultural-political status is to orient citizenship education as merely *positioned by* such debates rather than also being able to in turn *re-position* these aspects through careful analysis and deconstruction. Surely citizenship education has a job to do in identifying *why* certain things become reified?

What this begins to foreground are social-political-cultural discussions that seemingly exist within and around activities such as that which opened this article. Each of the statements presented to the pupils had a particular embedded meaning both constructed by *and* constructive of social-political-cultural forms and processes. For example, a consideration of statement one, 'someone who knowingly breaks the rules' engages us in discussions about rules, *how* we know and *come to* know these rules and the relationship they have with social order and structure. In turn, such deliberations contribute to the public face of and form for discussions *about* the rules and their formulation. The statement also requires political understanding: when deliberating what is meant by rules in the context implied and described by the statement, the pupil is implicitly and/or explicitly required to consider complex power interactions that seem to shape everyday activities and interactions. Similarly, the statement is a cultural referent; varying systems for social and political engagement will co-exist to define and construct an understanding of the relative merits of 'knowingly breaking the rules', an understanding that is subject to an array of interrelated, yet possibly contradictory cultural referents. British views (if we might ever be able to isolate such things) might well differ from European, African or Middle Eastern interpretations. But such deliberations are not only embedded *within* the substantive content of the activity in question. The very decision to use such a task, its relationship to the curriculum (both school and national) and its ability to mediate prior and future pupil understanding, do more than merely *allude* to social-political-cultural

perspectives: they are both the product *and* producer of such narratives. Classroom interactions are social, political and cultural events; they both represent such dimensions and contribute to their ongoing construction.

It would appear then that even seemingly simple requirements within school are highly complex. For the student teacher however, such issues are probably not upper-most in the mind: probably what is are issues such as using the right words, ensuring pupils sit down and do the task and the appropriate use of ICT and other resources. These are the teaching competences that are foregrounded when trying to meet the standards for QTS (TTA, 2002). However, the above social-political-cultural points need discussing and debating, one reason perhaps why teacher education, both initial and continuing has and must continue to have a relationship with higher education: the role for lecture, seminar and tutorial perhaps?

Seemingly then, the original task is rather more complex than might otherwise have initially been viewed. In attempting to position the 'correct' responses with their associated statements pupils are in effect situated within a complex relationship between the world of drugs in sport, the texts used to describe aspect of this, the requirements of the task, the ciphers on the page and the relationship between pupil and teacher to name but a few. Possibly the only thoughts regarding the level of 'difficulty' that the beginning teacher had prior to deciding to use this activity centred on the pupils' reading and comprehension levels (as described by scores on a reading test perhaps) and the work that preceded the lesson in question. In one sense such deliberations might begin to hold up to scrutiny discussions similar to those outlined previously: in considering pupils' reading and comprehension levels the student is clearly deliberating over the text. However, I would guess that in this case such thoughts centred more on absolute measures of reading scores rather than the cultural, social and political aspects represented by

and inherent within the phrases and activity of the task. I say this not to rubbish the work of the trainee teacher but rather for two other reasons: firstly to illustrate the complexity of teaching and learning to teach, (once again an overtly political point therefore); and secondly to position what is to follow.

## Learning as mediated activity

The above discussion concerning 'reading', by highlighting the social-political-cultural aspects of learning, foregrounds debate about the interrelationship between pupil, teacher and that 'to be learnt'. Although the classroom situation which sparked this debate required (in some form or another) an intervention (by the teacher, another pupil or perhaps other *artefacts* such as books or the world-wide-web) it is fair to say that not all which comes to be understood and known in school must be so mediated. There are many learning instances that occur directly and perhaps naturally and which seemingly require no intervention or interaction. In such cases the relationship between the learner (subject) and that to be learnt (object) is direct and straightforward. However, whenever a learning moment requires intervention it becomes also a 'teaching' moment. What I mean here is that to develop the subject-object relationship further, someone or something provides support. How such intervention occurs (a shared discussion, a lesson or a whole-school career perhaps) is thus a *learning-teaching* moment; the subject-object relationship is *mediated*. If we return to the original statement-response exercise, the object of knowing ('understanding' the task, 'reading' the text, 'correctly' pairing statement and response, etc.) is a mediated activity, that is to say arriving at 'knowing' (we will come to discuss this further later on) is non-deterministic: it is *acted upon by* and *acts upon* social, cultural and historical factors (Daniels, 2001). Quite whether such mediation is semiotic or activity-based is a further discussion too elaborate to hold here; suffice to raise two points. Firstly, and for the

purposes of this discussion, mediation is taken to be any interaction that supports the development of a subject-object relationship and secondly, for a superb discussion of this and many other issues outlined here, Daniels (2001) is an essential text.

Learning then, might be seen as an aspect of direct and unmediated activity and/or indirect and mediated action. Taken together this is represented in figure 2. The development of the subject-object relationship can thus be understood as determin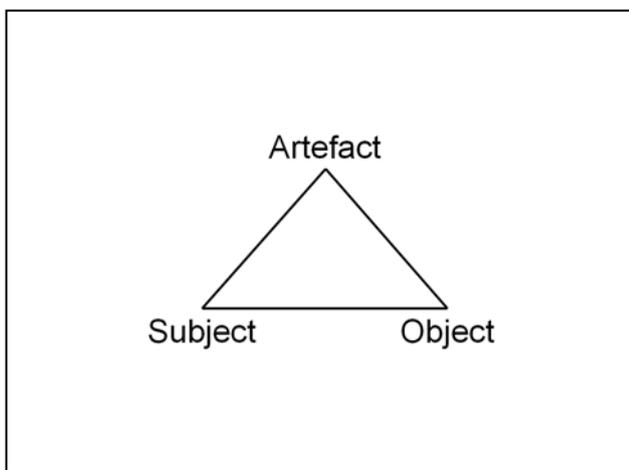istic *and* direct or non-deterministic *and* mediated by artefacts such as material tools, psychological tools and other human beings (Kozulin, 1998). Returning to the original task once again, it would seem pertinent then to consider further the relationship between the pupil, the adult and the artefact in question (in this instance the matching task). Using the work of Cole (1996), Daniels (*op cit*) offers an illuminating and insightful commentary on how pupils come to be able to read independently something seemingly required by the activity in question.



Figure 2 (from Daniels, 2001: 14)

To start, it is important to note the cultural contingency of child conceptual and higher cognitive functional development. Using the work of Vygotsky, Cole (*ibid*) outlines the interplay between *interpsychological* developmental aspects and those that occur *intrapsychologically*. Thus, he proposes that in *coming to know*, children first develop understanding at a social level (interpsychologically) before such understanding is embedded inside the child (intrapsychologically). Daniels goes on to note that applying this to reading development suggests a mediatory role for adults.

The adult creates a means by which the child can participate in the activity of reading before they can actually read alone. A social activity of reading is created with the object of transferring control of the activity from the adult to the child (*op cit*: 33, 34)

What this offers is one way of construing teacher involvement *in* and hence a relationship *with* pupil learning. Clearly, in some respects pupils have a direct and deterministic relationship with the world around them. In other situations however, children require the intervention of adults in the form of mediation. One role for the teacher in reading development is therefore to use the written word to mediate pupils' understanding so they might eventually come to understand *both* directly *and* through text. Put simply, the goal of instruction is to position the pupil in relation to the world *and* text as described in figure 3.
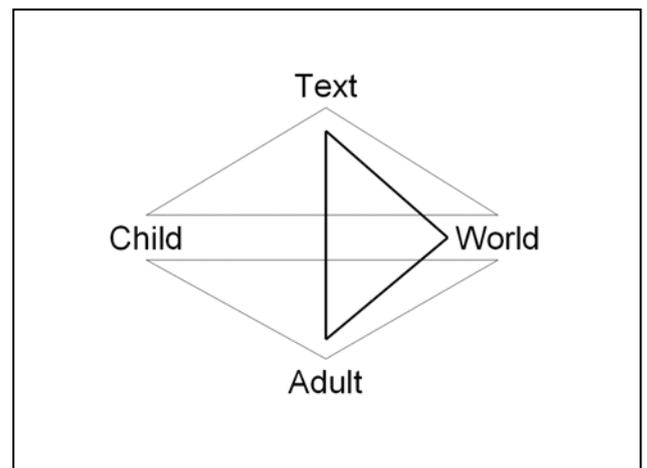
Figure 3 (from Daniels, 2001: 34)

**Overcoming a problem: what happens when a wrong answer is given?**

I stated earlier that the reading debate offered two interesting insights into learning in citizenship education; thus to my second issue. At some point during the lesson, I forget which and why, I decided to work with a small group. I cannot recall whether I chose this group because they appeared to be having difficulties or were 'off-task'; whatever the reason I ended up working with a group of two boys and two girls. After a short while mediating their learning I initiated a discussion with one girl in particular. She seemed reticent and reluctant to match response with statement. I checked she understood the task (she appeared to), that she could read the words (in this case decode them and relay to me in an appropriate way some form of understanding –

she could), whether she was mindful to complete the task ('do you want to do this and can you see why it might be important to do so?" – she could) all to no avail. I concluded that her trepidation was due to some lack of understanding about which response matched with which statement. So, we began to work through them one at a time.

She did the first one with little support from me. She then considered the statement 'Something that makes you perform better'. I felt sure she would attach the response 'performance enhancing' (there is a clear *linguistic* link between the word 'perform' in the statement and 'performance' in the response) so I did not offer any guidance. Her response somewhat baffled me: instead of so locating statement and response she paired 'Something that makes you perform better' with 'cheat'. Not to be outdone, I asked her to look again. As soon as I did so I balked; I had missed an extremely opportune moment to engage in a discussion about *why* she had paired statement and response as she had. Too late, the pupil now understood that she was 'wrong' and that in order to complete the task appropriately, she must find another answer. This she duly did and 'correctly' paired statement and response. I outline this not to signal my ineptitude and obvious need to work more often in schools but rather to connect the previous discussion with the next.

If we return to the preceding discussion about texts and reading we might venture that by initially situating statement and response as she did this pupil bypassed the text in question and used an answer she felt provided a suitable fit. Thus, we might venture that she did, in effect use an alternative text or more widely speaking an alterative artefact or set of artefacts. Rather than use what was in front of her or learning deployed from preceding lessons the pupil used an alternative, possibly from another subject or even perhaps from her wider social-political-cultural world.

In this latter vein, one alternative we might consider is gaming: in such situations the use of a 'cheat' signals methods and actions that can glean reward for the player in the form of, for example, extended lives, ways out of tricky situations, an infinite existence for your character or increased points. Thus, it may well be that the pupil drew upon texts other than those presented to her by the teacher: in this case gaming. Perhaps therefore she should be congratulated for mediating into the classroom environment the knowledge and skills she possesses that result from her social-political-cultural world. While in the context of sport 'cheat' might well carry negative connotations, in the world of gaming the phrase invokes alternative meaning and hence an insight into a different game-participant relationship. In the gaming world 'cheating' is a sensible thing to do that carries positive positioning within the gaming fraternity. We might even suggest that discovering and using a 'cheat' establishes kudos in the social-political-cultural gaming group. Thus, by situating 'something that makes you perform better' with 'cheat' we might venture that the pupil was attempting to enter into a discourse of positive self-establishment; that is, through mediating her extra-school social world into that of the inter-school she was attempting to position herself favourably within the classroom context. Of course we cannot be sure: her knowledge and experience of gaming were never established. However, the above perspective offers us alternative insights not only into why perhaps she answered as she did but also how such an answer might well be an overtly political act designed to position her more favourably.

There is, of course, another element to this discussion: the answer the pupil constructed and relayed into the classroom space was considered *wrong*. In part this was due to the rules of the activity: four responses were provided to four statements; each response corresponded with one statement; no statement/response could be left over; the correct pairings were pre-

established; and the task linked with work undertaken in previous lessons. Had the activity been presented in another way, perhaps as a forum for discussion and debate as to why certain responses would *seem* to fit more appropriately within the context of drugs in sport then the pupil might not have even ventured the answer she did. Alternatively, the answer she gave might be re-positioned as an important and interesting proposal. This was not the case however, and an assessment of her answer would in effect position her response as 'inaccurate'.

It would seem therefore that there are at least two more areas for deliberation that arise from what might be seen as simply a mistake. Firstly, how might we describe 'truth' and associated delineations of a 'correct' answer in citizenship education? Secondly, what might be the nature of the practice described in the classroom community as resulting from a particular paradigmatic truth position adopted? It is to these and in this order that I now wish to turn.

**Citizenship education and 'truth'**

The Vygotskian theories previously used to describe possible social-political-cultural perspectives on reading and the acquisition of reading ability demonstrate how children might come to interact and know about the world in which they live. This knowing can be both declarative (knowing that) and procedural (knowing how) and can obviously be much wider than the reading example cited before. The inter-subjective nature of learning posited by Vygotskian theory clearly articulates a role for relationships in 'coming to know'. The shift in cognition from the social to the individual demonstrates a need to view some aspects of learning (for others can be viewed as deterministic) as in effect social-political-cultural acts, that is they have a relational component *to* and *with* the social, cultural and political. While the process of certain

aspects of learning might be readily accepted thus (that is positioned as social-political-cultural mediated actions) there still remains debate as to the knowledge forms themselves; how might their existence be viewed? To consider this further, I wish to return, for the last time, to the reading debate.

The initial discussion in this paper argued that reading is more than the establishment of a series of applicable techniques. I tried to demonstrate that reading is situated geographically, culturally, socially, politically and temporally. This debate, although very brief illuminates that which Roy describes as '…struggles over defining the very horizons of our experience that produce very different and antagonistic positions' (2005: 100) and requires a paradigmatic discussion: mind-sets that offer one the means to garner coherent thoughts about the world and their part within it and thus the methods by which investigations can be undertaken (Bartlett *et al*, 2001: 41). To this end, I now wish to deliberate about 'correct' and 'incorrect' and how this relates to epistemological agreement both in relation to 'coming to be able to read' and 'giving a correct answer'.

If, in order to understand and enter into the task of matching statement and response, pupils were seen to need only to be able to decode representational ciphers and relate these to prior knowledge then necessarily they are positioned as requiring the ability to correctly ascribe a one-to-one relationship between words and the object/s they represent. Furthermore, as, in this view, these objects and their properties are seen to exist independently of language and conceptual understanding, a correct answer is a response which not only unambiguously maps to a direct and material reality (Roy, 2005) but is one which orients learning as the explicit adoption and recital of certain 'truths'. However, this *realist* positioning of 'truth' although often presented as incontrovertible is the result of a particular mindset that sees knowledge as hard,

real and capable of being transmitted and acquired in a tangible form (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). In this position, knowledge of the subject-object relationship exists as an objective reality, verifiable through positivist empirical enquiry; truth is judged as *correspondence* between the research account and what is (Pring, 2000), independent of those involved. Such realist epistemology sees knowledge as an awareness of objects ('a behaviour', a 'social event' for example) that exist independently of any subject and which themselves have intrinsic meaning: knowledge, as correspondence to a real world reality is thus only thought of as 'true' if it correctly reflects that independent world (Murphy, 1997). In this vein, knowledge is stable and discoverable because the *essential* properties of objects are knowable and unchanging; the purpose of the mind is to 'mirror' reality and meaning is imposed by the structure of a *real* world not the knowledge holder (Jonassen, 1991, p. 28). Our senses and cognitive processes objectively mediate incoming data to provide us with a psychological world set against an external reality (Littledyke, 1998).

In example, the aforementioned matching of statement to response, if viewed from such a realist perspective is positioned in two ways. Firstly: that there is a matching which is representative of an external reality that exists and which would continue to exist outside of human cognising; secondly, that individuals can come to know this reality and that by knowing are able (given communicative faculties and abilities) to relay the independent statement-response relationship. In this way, the 'incorrect' pairing the girl demonstrated would be judged so because it fails to accurately signal the one-to-one correspondent relationship between performance enhancing substances and their intended purpose. In aligning 'cheat' with the statement in question, the pupil has not understood the correct pairing, a pairing that exists not because 'we say so', but because it *is* independent of human thought and enquiry.

As a counterpoint, we might conjecture that when 'reading' the matching task pupils are complicit in producing the social-cultural-political reality of the learning-teaching moment and in so doing are engaged in a critical project. More specifically, it could be said that knowledge is a construction of the mind (Bodner, 1986) whereby interaction creates findings: truth is thus a consensus between informed and sophisticated constructors (Pring, 2000). 'Correct' in this, a *constructivist* paradigm is seen as an indication of how the world might be; information is positioned as prediction (Postlethwaite, 1993). Theories and ideas are accepted because of their superior ability to predict what will happen given a series of predetermined events (Hanley, 1994; Adams, 2003). Hence, the matching of statement with response as viewed from a constructivist, epistemological position describes two alternative beliefs. Firstly: that there exists a matching is an indication of a construction *that is* the statement-response pairing. Accordingly, there is no correct statement-response pairing *independent* of situated human cognising. In part therefore, the requirements of the learning-teaching moment position and describe a 'correct' response. Secondly: when individuals come to *know* they are in effect relaying a social-political-cultural prediction described as having a better 'fit' with that 'known' both interpsychologically and intrapsychologically. When pupils are 'correct', they therefore relay a statement-response relationship dependent upon human thought and creation. With reference to the incorrect pairing that sparked this debate there seems to be an alternative perspective. In this case, the pairing is considered to be 'incorrect' because it does not, in the social-political-cultural context in which it is relayed provide an accurate appraisal of the requirements of the task; that is, the wrong answer does not 'fit' with the expected outcomes of the activity. In this vein, alternative proposals about gaming, etc. whilst providing plausible and interesting options for discussion are superfluous to the task in hand and the learning to be demonstrated.

In summary therefore, realism argues that facts exist independently of human theorising and are 'out there' ready to be discovered and explained whereas constructivism posits that facts *describe*, and in so doing constitute that which is presently seen to be the best prediction. Constructivist epistemology holds that knowledge reflects an ordering and organisation of a world constituted by our experiences (Von Glasersfeld, 1984: 24).

This epistemological discussion might seem unnecessary in a paper that seeks to describe learning and citizenship education. While it might seem pertinent to a philosophical treatise on research or methodological wrangling within the natural sciences it could be argued that as citizenship education positions itself as a social (or perhaps political) science deliberations about the nature of truth would seem, if not redundant then certainly not requiring such extensive treatment. However, I would disagree. I can say with some clarity that the views I have regarding knowledge and the ways in which individuals arrive at 'what they know' play a large part in formulating the pedagogical positions I hold; I would venture that this is similar for others. In this regard, I feel it is crucial that all teachers consider the origins of their views on such matters and subsequent learning-teaching orientations. Furthermore, as teachers are the ultimate key to educational change and improvement (Leat, 1999) then it is important that epistemological underpinnings to pedagogy are realised and articulated (Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood 2004). As Hein (1991) notes: pedagogic principles are to a large degree shaped by our epistemological stance.

**Positioning learning through constructivist epistemology**

Earlier I indicated that learning-teaching interactions require some form of mediation so that learners might come to some understanding of the world in which they live. This being the case, it would seem pertinent to note what form pedagogic practice might take in relation to a particular epistemological position. To some small extent this has already been undertaken: what I intend to do next is pull the strands together in order that we might examine in more depth learning from a constructivist perspective and its relationship with and to current educational theorising.

Increasingly those involved in education are adopting the belief that learners shape their own minds through their own actions; in effect *learning as construction* (Silcock, 2003).  In stance, such positions derive from constructivist epistemology.  It is important to realise however that the term 'constructivist-learning' describes a series of ideas that can be thought of as sharing some family resemblance (Adams, 2006); the term describes a diversity of learning related discourses that have been clustered together under a common banner (Davis and Sumara, 2003).  Although the various constructivist theories differ, their family resemblance is conferred by three similarities (Davis and Sumara, 2003). Firstly, all adopt a non-Cartesian position for progress in learning: that is they all understand learning as fluid and non-linear. Secondly, the dynamics (ranging from the personal to the social) by which such construction is achieved are regarded as the means by which the learner maintains coherence. Thirdly, all reject realist assumptions for learning: learning, as the internalisation of an external, pre-human-cognition reality to be discovered and understood is anathema to constructivist theorising.

Learning, within a constructivist paradigm is thus a process of active knowledge construction (Woolfolk, 1993) with consensus *between* individuals held to be the ultimate criteria upon which to judge the veracity or otherwise of knowledge and not some form of 'objective truth-test'. As

Heylighen (1993: 2) explains, ''Truth' or 'reality' will be accorded only to those constructions on which most people of a social group agree'. In this sense, learning becomes the development of intrapsychological meaning more able to predict socially agreeable interpsychological positions. Duly, students who were previously judged to have failed to understand can alternatively be said to have inadequately synthesised information in order to relay a socially acceptable interpretation (Cognition and Technology Group, 1991). Through an appreciation of thought processes, cognitive conflict and socially appropriate predictive ability, learning ceases to be judged as the acceptance of fact with associated problems of 'wrongness', and becomes interpretation, question creation and the appreciation of validity as defined by socially recognisable and appropriate forms: a process of discarding and revising (Davis and Sumara, 2003). Constructivism thus reconstitutes learning '…as a complex phenomenon, subject to an array of subtle and imposing, explicit and tacit, deliberate and accidental, social and biological influences' (Davis and Sumara, 2003: 130). The aim of learning is thus to become aware of the realities of others and their relationship *with* and *to* one's own. As the knowledge constructed is an *indication* of how the world *might be*, a variety of theoretical possibilities are acceptable, not because of their independent accuracy but because of their ability to *predict*. It is then but a step to note that in order for learning to improve, students must be enabled to access those elements of learning that support the development and mediation of personal interpretation (Hein, 1991).

However, all is not as simple as might initially seem. Constructivist theories through their representation of learning as subtle and complex specifically deny a simplistic and deterministic relationship between that which a teacher teaches and that which a learner learns. More specifically, *social*-constructivist theories of learning concur with the aforementioned Vygotskian ideas in that they focus attention on the deterministic/non-deterministic learning relationship and the role for the *significant other* in mediating such endeavours; in short they signal that although

*aspects* of learning might be dependent on teaching, learning is never *solely determined* by teaching (Davis and Sumara, 2003). Once again the need to consider social-political-cultural positions is foregrounded.

In short, we must remember that discussion about constructivist-based learning highlights not what teachers must do, but rather what they *cannot do*; in this respect it acts as a 'modifier' which points to *possible effect*. Mere acquiescence to constructivist theoretical posturing is problematic: as Von Glasersfeld (1995) notes constructivism is a *description of* not a prescription *for* learning. When one considers general constructivist epistemology and concomitant ramifications one realises that constructivism does not *simply* translate into pedagogy. Accordingly, as a paradigm benefits lie in offerings for *critical debate*: constructivist discourse diverts the focus of attention away from proposals about what teaching *should* and *must* look like (Davis and Sumara, 2002) and instead provides a challenge to aspects of educational posturing that purport to establish learning and teaching 'realities'. Adopting a constructivist position *as critique* rather than as a form for and of direct pedagogical advice offers illuminating possibilities. In turn, it is possible to identify a number of themes through which we might begin to undertake such critique through the prism of constructivist theorising.

1. Learning and performance
2. Learners as *active co-constructors* of meaning and knowledge
3. Tasks: means to an end or ends in themselves?
4. Assessment: divergent or convergent?

**Learning and performance**

At the heart of a performance orientation to learning is the need to ensure that pupils exhibit behaviours that can be accredited (i.e. graded and celebrated) through anonymous, externally moderated marking procedures. Pressure thus exists to orient teaching as the most efficient way to get information from the teacher and into the minds of the students so that they might *acquire* the knowledge and skills required to perform well. The associated orientation of learning is one of knowledge reception *by* pupils *from* the teacher, via carefully constructed, teacher-centred activities designed to support correct acquisition and favourable demonstration. Unfortunately, *learning* becomes lost within the morass of deliberation about input and output, i.e. a black box view (Ball, 1999). For citizenship education this is problematic. Although external exams for the subject now exist, it would seem curious to adopt an orientation for learning which above all else targets success in exams when in orientation citizenship education seeks to provide young people with the skills and opportunities to examine and deconstruct the very hegemonic perspectives which define education in such narrow terms as league tables and test scores. This is not to suggest that GCSE Citizenship Studies for example is *inherently* problematic, rather it suggests that merely describing *successful* learning in such performance terms reduces considerably those opportunities for critical debate which seek to position learning as part of a critical educational project.

Furthermore, performance orientations remove the locus of control from pupils; teachers become the focus for success. Although research suggests that pupils attribute success to a number of factors (Weeden and Winter, 1999; Weiner, 1996), a concern for improving one's performance is more likely to engender feelings of 'learned helplessness' (Dweck, 1999) whereupon difficulty is avoided, repetition favoured and ability doubted. Consequently, pupils

cease to persevere in the face of difficulty (MacGilchrist, 2003). Once again I would suggest that for citizenship education this is problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, the removal of the locus of control from pupils implicitly reorients the subject as something *done to* students. This is curious in that it positions students as non-actors in debate about public policy. Secondly, whilst we might acknowledge that some form of hierarchy within school is necessary, not least as current legislation and societal makeup so requires, locating students consciously and repeatedly as dependent upon teachers is seemingly anathema to the original desires of the Crick Report.

Conversely, a 'learning orientation' (Watkins, 2001) keeps the locus of control squarely with the pupil. Here, effort is seen to bring reward, i.e. an increase in achievement as measured through personal progress against previous positions. In this orientation, learners describe themselves in terms of deepening understanding and derive satisfaction from perseverance and success in difficult tasks (Dweck, 1999; Watkins, 2001). If citizenship education truly desires to support pupils in their development as critically conscious, social actors then it would appear that learning as performance is problematic.

**Learners as *active co-constructors* of meaning and knowledge**

Implicit and therefore vital within constructivist theory is the concept of mind: learning as *mindful activity*. More specifically, and drawing upon related cognitive theory, social constructivism posits that existing knowledge structures and beliefs support or militate against new learning (Shepard, 2000). Additionally social constructivism readily incorporates social, political and cultural factors as essential to the formulation of understanding. In emphasising the mediatory role of others in the individual construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning, in this

paradigm, is positioned as a social process (Shepard, 2000) wherein individuals bring implicit theories and perspectives derived from their cultural milieu (Sutherland *et al*, 2004). In turn, such inter-psychological aspects of knowledge creation themselves assist in the formulation of the social-cultural-political context. Thus, whilst teachers have an important role in developing and arranging contrasts in order to stimulate discussion and thought, pupils are also so aligned; the view that pupil learning is merely a *reaction* to the social-cultural-political is seen as untenable. Instead, learning is viewed as dual-agentic, i.e. learner and teacher engage to co-construct the learning space; their decisions 'scaffold' each other (Silcock, 2003). The discursive nature of such learning environments emphasises the need for pupils to be given time to talk, with teacher as listener and observer. Such perspectives are supported by The Assessment Reform Group (AFG, 1999: 8) which notes that teachers should observe and listen to how pupils describe their work and their reasoning and set tasks that require pupils to use skills and apply ideas which employ a variety of communicative methods, e.g. role-play, concept-mapping, drawing and the use of artefacts. The most obvious response therefore is the devising of open-ended tasks that require students to think critically, solve complex problems and apply their knowledge in and to *their* world (Shepard, 2000).

However, and importantly for citizenship education, the idea of co-construction should not be confined to teacher-pupil interaction alone. The exploitation of peer approaches to learning provides possible answers to the problems of encouraging and enabling pupils to take gradually more control over their own learning; such moves are readily offered as elements of citizenship education. As Holden states (2003: 26, 27), if in citizenship education we wish children to respect the rights of others and exercise judgment and clarity of thought then the pupil's voice must be heard and respected and methods should be used that encourage an articulation of

ideas, participation and interaction. Indeed, this is fully endorsed by official documentation on the teaching of citizenship education at key stages three and four.

> *Citizenship gives pupils the knowledge, skills and understanding to play an effective role in society at local, national and international levels. It helps them to become informed, thoughtful and responsible citizens who are aware of their duties and rights…It encourages pupils to play a helpful part in the life of their schools, neighbourhoods, communities and the wider world. (DfEE and QCA, 1999: 183).*

In support, constructivist perspectives on learning position the learner-teacher interaction as one based on mutual organisation (Hanley, 1994; Crowther, 1997). Indeed, constructivism critiques the notion of teacher-as-instructor and instead reaffirms the inter-personal and interpsychological mediatory nature of learning. In this way, teachers become repositioned as guides, working to provide students with opportunities and incentives to construct knowledge and understanding (Copley, 1992). What alters is the way teaching and teacher identity are re-conceptualised. In a practical sense this re-conceptualisation focuses thinking on activities that provide pupil-world, case-based learning to enable authentic, context oriented, reflective practice within a collaborative and social environment (Jonassen, 1994; Rice and Wilson, 1999). Most contentiously, the constructivist environment advocates the gradual transference of power to set the learning agenda to the learner.

Importantly however, such orientations do not remove the need for the teacher; rather they re-direct teacher activity toward the provision of a safe environment whereby student knowledge construction and social mediation are paramount. Such orientations require teachers to understand the requirements and stages through which students travel on their journey towards understanding that in turn might successfully mediate into the socio-cultural space.

**Tasks: means to an end or ends in themselves?**

Silcock (2003: 50) states

> A 'true' education is exactly that where learners grasp what is worthwhile for its own sake rather than as means to other ends (such as passing tests or hitting learning targets).

Although teachers cannot learn *on behalf of* the pupil, nor can they in all honesty *make* someone learn, they can do certain things to help mediate the subject-object relationship. Acknowledging the social-cultural-political perspective sits neatly with citizenship education's drive to provide pupil-world perspectives for learning situations. Research demonstrates (Bereiter, 2001) that school-learning which implicitly connects to a learner's wider, personal agenda is more likely to transfer between home and school. Thus, providing a wider-than-school social-cultural-political context for tasks in effect shapes school into something tangible rather than ephemeral and obscure. Those aspects of school-learning that are transferable due to their occurring as part of the wider milieu become not only embedded in the processes of school-learning, but also themselves alter the classroom context as well. The statement-response pairings outlined previously can now be seen as providing excellent opportunities for exploring the different perspectives offered by 'official' interpretations of drugs in sport and those constructed by the pupil given *their* life-world. Adopting a constructivist position from which to consider learning offers a deconstruction of views and not mere acceptance of fact. *What* pupils think, *why* and *how* such thoughts seem to fit with the requirements of the socio-cultural-political context within which they are expressed seems now to be of utmost importance and not merely 'an answer'.

**Assessment: divergent or convergent?**

Traditionally, assessment, learning and teaching have been seen as three, albeit related, but separate aspects of education (Graue, 1993). Perhaps, however, a more useful perspective is to position the latter as embedded within the learning-teaching process (Shepard, 2000). Duly, assessment is re-construed: from the means by which reward might be conferred, to a source of insight and help for all involved in the learning-teaching interaction. More specifically, constructivist critique positions assessment as the means by which we might consider *how* and *why* pupil positions do not successfully mediate into the social domain; that is, how and why do pupil responses not 'fit' with current, socially agreed interpretations? Interestingly, Vygotskian perspectives on the interpsychological aspects of knowledge construction propose a dynamic learner-teacher interaction and provide possible insights into three assessment issues. Firstly, and drawing on Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), (the difference between that which a learner can do independently and that which can be achieved with the support of a more significant other), while it should be obvious that support provides rich opportunities for *teaching*, the re-designation of assessment as a dynamic, integral and ongoing part also of *learning* bolsters links *between all three*. Specifically, by providing assistance during teaching episodes which are in themselves viewed as assessment opportunities, teachers not only teach, they gain insights into *what* has been constructed and *how* this might be extended and modified. Moreover, the ZPD opens up possibilities for peer-assessment whereby pupil communities of practice provide opportunities for, and requirements to share thought processes.

Secondly, the conversational requirement of inter-psychological knowledge creation utilises pupils' implicit theories and perspectives as the basis upon which further learning is to be built. Assessment in such forms provides a touchstone upon which those engaged in a learning

dialogue might agree on that which successfully predicts and that which requires further development and thought.

Thirdly, and following on from the above two points, simply assigning assessment the role of the attribution of right and wrong requires the identification and correction of student errors. Conversely, assessment *as* learning-teaching provides a number of opportunities for feed-back *and* feed-forward. In this vein answers might be *ignored* when inconsequential or *forestalled* by offering hints or asking leading questions (Shepard, 2000). Quintessentially, the teacher provides support and guidance while diagnosing student interpretation to inform and direct further action (Driver *et al*, 1994). In effect what is proposed is the re-orientation of assessment in divergent terms (Torrance and Pryor, 1998) whereupon it provides information about *what* the learner knows, understands or can do rather than merely seeking clarification about *whether* change might have occurred. From a theoretical perspective, divergent assessment is constructivist in orientation, undertaken, as it is, from an intention to illuminate that which can be done *with* support, i.e. in the ZPD. Practically, divergent assessment is non-judgemental, yields insights into understanding and prompts meta-cognition. More importantly, it recognises the need to involve pupils in self-and peer-assessment through the use of discursive and collaborative learning-teaching strategies.

**Conclusion**

What I have tried to do here is offer alternative insights into learning and its relationship with classroom activity. To my mind such discussions are vital if we are to improve educational practice in its widest sense. However, I also see learning in citizenship education as potentially somewhat more problematic than other subjects. I say this not because I think that it is

inherently 'harder' but because its very purpose seems to be to deconstruct wider social-political-cultural activities which co-exist to orient education (and other, related policy perspectives). In this respect it would seem pertinent therefore to offer some sort of critique as to how we might begin to orient our discussions so as to acknowledge such perspectives. The initial reading debate I hope provided an insight into how seemingly simple activities can be re-construed in ways that offer wider and richer seams for debate. If we subscribe to the view that 'learning to read' is a critical project demonstrative of wider social-political-cultural aspects of learning then perhaps we might begin to debate those very issues with which citizenship education seeks to engage. Similarly, the epistemological analysis of 'right' and 'wrong' while possibly simplistic, at least gets us thinking about why we come to view answers as correct or incorrect. Once again, if the critical project that I would argue is citizenship education is to take hold, then it is surely vital that we debate such issues. Mere acceptance of fact is somewhat insufficient for the citizenship education project, not only because it is a social-political-cultural 'subject' but because adopting (perhaps) other (perhaps constructivist) orientations to describe and challenge existing pedagogical positions offers alternative perspectives.

But it is important that such debates do not become divorced from the practical classroom context. To this end, I have tried to show that much that is now proposed as 'good practice' seems to align with constructivist principles. However, here I would add a caveat: it is not that we should all try to 'become' constructivist teachers or indeed try to 'design' constructivist classrooms; constructivism as considered within education should not try to do this. What I hope is apparent is my desire to see constructivism provide a form *of* and *for* debate about how we *might* view learning. I do not wish professionals merely to adopt such perspectives; rather what I would suggest is that it is more fruitful to use the ideas presented herein as but *one* basis to identify *why* one thinks as one does about learning, teaching and contemporary educational

policy. Perhaps then we might all begin to understand how we come to *both* design the classroom (and wider) environments in which we work, but also, how these in turn *define and describe us.*

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