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Teaching as a political activity: the teacher as a political actor

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Some fifty kilometres north of this conference is Helsingor and the castle of Kronborg, built in 1420. This is Elsinore, the location for Shakespeare's drama *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. The play hinges on the dilemma the Prince faces: to act on the knowledge of his father's murder – and all that this entails, in feigning madness, confronting the murderer and extracting am acknowledgement, and then taking revenge – or not to act, to accept fortune, to opt out. In the words of the famous soliloquy at the beginning of Act Three:

To be or not to be? that is the question;
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them

The final lines of the speech suggest that all events in life can become problematic if one dwells upon them and allows oneself to be overwhelmed by the magnitude and the responsibility:

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.

This indecisiveness and uncertainty of knowledge – dominant themes through the play – demonstrate the choice between taking action – "to be" – and silent acceptance - "not to be" as Hamlet's dilemma. To be noble, and "suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" is *not to be,* while "to take arms against a sea of troubles/and by opposing end them" is *to be*.

This paper is about the teacher's dilemma, which is not *whether* to take action, but *what* action to take. Teachers must necessarily face up to slings and arrows, but there are critical choices and decisions to be made in *how* to act. There are decisions to be made, and I will argue today that these decisions are critical for how we educate young citizens, and how we develop with them conceptions of rights – human rights that are the core theme of this conference – and that these are decisions that are essentially political. Teachers are political actors, and teaching itself is a political activity.

Teaching is not a neutral activity. Education can reproduce existing social patterns, as had been argued by Bowles and Gintis (1976), who have traced the correspondence between educational structures and policies and the needs of a capitalist society for compliant and motivated workers; by Bourdieu (1973), who identified how educational systems privileged and transmitted particular forms of social capital; and Apple (1982) points to how educational systems contrive to maintain inequalities in power. I will argue that education and teaching – and teachers - also have the power to transform society, and to promote equity and social justice.

Education and teaching have pivotal roles in the development of the understanding of society. It used to be held that the role of education was to transmit existing social structures: to reproduce social patterns, structures and relationships. Well over a century ago, Durkheim characterised education as "the image and *reflection* of society. It imitates and reproduces the latter in an abbreviated form; it does not create it" (1897, p 372; emphasis added). Education was held to hold a mirror to society, reproducing social behaviour, distinctions and patterns (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; also Williams, 1961) – or, in the words Shakespeare gives to Hamlet, "to hold the mirror up to nature".

But education can also have a transformative role. Teaching can change and translate society, rather than simply reproduce it. It can open new opportunities to individuals and groups, enhancing their ability to participate in the community – economically, politically and socially. Social exclusion can be lessened, inequities reduced, and access to power, influence and involvement increased. Much of this is achieved by ensuring that the structures that provide education distribute knowledge, ideas, skills and attitudes in ways that all groups and classes of people can achieve. Social and civic education in particular can develop particular abilities and attitudes that are especially important for the development of a civic culture amongst young people (Hladnik, 1995).

There are two contradictory ideas about the function of education in this. In one sense, society uses education to create members of society: we are taught to be who we are. Educational processes – curricular, evaluation, selection, structures – all prepare individuals to perform and behave in particular ways that are considered socially - and economically desirable. At the same time, we are the sum of the experiences we have learned from our society: we are what we have learned to be. Each individual has a degree of agency in selecting what he or she learns.

A few years ago, the Danish Minister of Education challenged the educational system to develop social democracy:

> "If an education must prepare for democracy, it must be democratically organised… We don't *suggest* a connection between democracy and education: we *insist* upon it." (Ole Vig Jensen, Minister of Education, August 1997, speech at Soroe)

It isn't just democracy: it is also a matter of inequity. We live, all of us, in unequal societies, and I argue that the educational system is not just complicit in this, a tacit onlooker, but that many educational policies and practices serve to entrench these inequalities, to reproduce these inequalities, and to justify and excuse these inequalities.

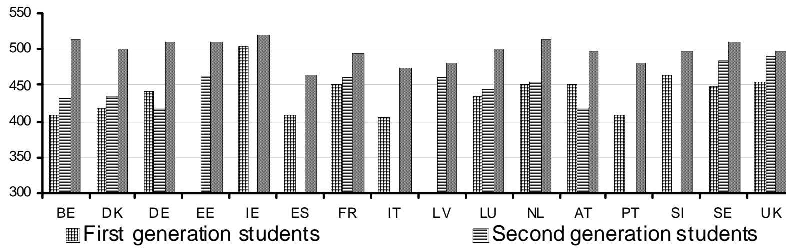
What do I mean here by inequality? I would focus particularly on differential levels of success and participation in education, where pupils from less advantaged groups are less likely to successfully complete their education, or to remain in post-compulsory full-time education: Goldthorpe (1996) and Erikson and Jonsson (1996) argue that lack of both economic and (increasingly in recent years) cultural resources make parents from lower social classes less able to support their children in studying, or to make them aware of the potential benefits of continued participation in post-compulsory education.

This distinguishes between inequalities between individuals and those that are between groups. There will always be some form of inequality between how individuals perform and succeed in many aspects of life. It is important that resources are given to ensuring that significant inequalities are minimised, by giving additional support to disadvantaged individuals, and even more important that societies recognise that everyone has equality in terms of human rights, dignity and esteem. Later in this paper the idea of a rights-respecting classroom will be developed. At this juncture, the focus is on inequality between groups: that is, where an identifiable population has an overall distribution of performance significantly different from the distribution of performance of the mean population.

Last autumn the Commission published a Green Paper (European Commission, 2008) that highlighted the variations in educational outcomes in different countries. Figure 1 shows, by country, the differences in reading scores by first generation, second generation and 'native' students. The key comparison to be made here is *not* the comparative scores between countries, but the extent within each country to which first, and particularly second, generation students approach that county's norm for 'native' students. In most countries there is only minimal improvement between generations, with substantial differences between the second generation scores and the 'native' scores. In two countries (Germany and Austria) there is a fall in attainment – second generation pupils perform *less* well than their parents had performed. Only two countries – Sweden and the UK – show substantial progress.

Figure 1 - Differences in student performance in reading, by immigrant status and country 2005

(Performance on the reading scale – mean score; omitting all countries where no 1st or 2nd generation details available)

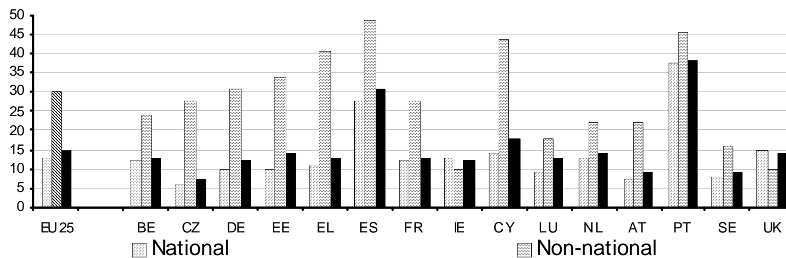


Data source: OECD PISA 2006 (Adapted from European Commission, 2008, Figure 3, p 6)

Figure 2 shows the proportion of young people between 18 and 24 years of age who have only compulsory secondary education and are not in any form of education or training. There are wide variations in the overall level of this between countries, and inter-country comparisons are again not useful. The key comparison to make in each case is the relative proportion of non-nationals to nationals. In most countries, far more non-nationals are not continuing their education when compared to nationals. But the ratios are not the same between all countries. In some countries, more than three times as many non-natives are not continuing their education compared to nationals, while in other countries it is much less than three times as many. In two countries – Ireland and the UK – a *higher* proportion of non-nationals are in continuing education or training. These discrepancies show how very much educational policies and practices are different in terms of educational outcomes for these particular groups, and the potentially different characteristics these groups may have in different countries. Equivalent data is not available for other kinds of groups, or for all countries, but these figures suggest that there are very great disparities between countries in terms of equality of educational outcomes.

Figure 2 - Share of early school leavers by nationality, 2005

(Percentage of the population aged 18-24 with only lower-secondary education and not in education or training, by nationality, 2005; omitting all countries where no Non-national details are available)



Data source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey), 2005 (Adapted from European Commission, 2008, Figure 5, p 7)

How is it possible to tell whether a particular group is suffering from some form of educational inequality? I would suggest here a series of markers that may signify inequality of outcome, that a group of us developed in the EPASI research programme (Ross *et al*, 2009). We emphasised educational *outcomes*, rather than educational *opportunities*. What evidence is there of difference between the achievement or performance of a group and the prevailing national norm. This is not always possible to determine, partly because of the very wide variety of ways in which data is collected in different countries, and, as has been noted above, the different categories and conceptualisations of difference that are found between countries. Studies such as the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), organised by the OECD, provide valuable comparative data, in a significant (though limited) number of areas (see, for example, European Commission, 2004; Haar *et al*, 2005; Stanat *et al*, 2006; Heckmann, 2008). We suggested that these markers need to be used for assessment, where applicable, not only at the end of the period of compulsory education, but also within this period and before formal education, as part of the process of addressing these educational inequalities.

Literacy

The level of functional literacy achieved, at whatever age for which data was available, can be a proxy for all attainment. Some countries also produce comparative data between different groups for curricular areas, but this seemed to be the most ubiquitous measure.

Post compulsory education participation in education or training

A highly educated workforce requires a significant proportion of the population staying in education beyond compulsory schooling, either for further education or for training (as shown in Figure 2, above). This is sometimes associated with a category called NEET – the proportion of the young adults '*n*ot in *e*mployment, *e*ducation or *t*raining'. Evidence that particular groups are significantly less involved in 'staying on' indicates significant disadvantage.

Higher Education

The 'knowledge society' anticipates a growing proportion of the population entering higher education. This provides significant access to professional occupations, to influence, power and social goods, and to better remunerated work. In most European countries admission to higher education is skewed in favour of particular socio-economic groups, and sometimes against ethnic and linguistic minorities and those with disabilities. There are also considerable gender disparities between different subjects.

Employment

Although educational systems are not provided merely to enable access to employment, most people expect one of the outcomes of successful education to be regular and satisfying employment. While the measurement of employment rates and occupational patterns of different groups will be indicative of potential larger societal discrimination, it will also indicate the level of educational success reached by members of a particular group.

School exclusion

Schooling is compulsory for particular ages, but schools can exclude pupils, on a temporary or even permanent basis. This power is sometimes exercised with some bias or discrimination against what is seen as 'normal' or 'mainstream' behaviour or practice. Exclusion rates that are high for particular groups reveal some are not receiving a full education, and discrimination against what is 'not normal'.

Social exclusion and bullying

Some discrimination is carried out by other pupils against their peers, in the form of bullying and other forms of harassment. This can damage the learning and study opportunities, and when records are kept they suggest that members of particular minorities are proportionately more bullied than others: again indicating some educational disadvantage.

Subject balance and other structural issues

Finally, in some instances educational systems apply, wittingly or wittingly, structural barriers to access to educational provision that may give rise to inequalities to particular groups. Restricting access to certain types of schooling as 'academic', as opposed to 'vocational', for example, can in practice limit entry to higher status educational streams to members of particular socio-economic groups. In many cases, an early division of this kind can mean that a child who has started on the 'vocational' route will find it very difficult to switch to the 'academic' route, if at all. Such early setting into streams has important implications in potentially restricting later access to higher education. There are also pressures of differential expectations of groups of pupils being used to affect subject choice – very commonly expressed examples of this function to restrict the entry of girls to scientific or technical subjects, but there are many others.

If members of a group are achieving a less favourable distribution of educational outcomes than the majority of the population, then I argue that it is reasonable to make an initial presumption that there have been inequalities in social and educational policies. The objective of policy should be to ensure that all groups within society have similar profiles of attainment. To achieve this may require differential (*unequal*) treatment for a particular group. The onus should be on those responsible for educational policy to demonstrate that all necessary policies are in place to achieve this. The fact that various groups

continue to suffer educational disadvantage, despite policy initiatives to counter this, suggests that whatever the intentions, educational systems institutionally discriminate against the disadvantaged. Developing from a definition of institutional racism (the *Macpherson Report* (UK Home Office, 1999)), the term *educational institutional inequality* might be useful employed to identify the collective failure of an educational institution or set of institutions to provide appropriate educational services to a minority group of the population because of their social, cultural, linguistic or behavioural characteristics. This can be detected in educational policies and practices that amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and stereotyping which leads to the group as a whole to achieve a lower set of educational outcomes than the majority population.

Nicaise (2000) has suggested that inequalities in education arise from two different forms of failures. Firstly, failures on the demand side, where unequal opportunities arise because of the socio-economic characteristics of social groups (such as poverty, material or cultural deprivation, health or lack of social or cultural capital) led, for the reasons identified by Breen (2001), to individuals from these groups declining to take up educational opportunities. Secondly, there are failures on the supply side, where educational policies and practices lead to disadvantageous treatment of members of a group in the educational process: this would include both institutional prejudice against these groups and the inability of institutions to actively respond to the specific and different needs of particular groups. Both of these are structural failings; and each interacts with the other. If the 'supply side' institutions cannot adequately support the group, then they create a situation in which members of the group lower their aspirations and expectations of success, and make fewer demands on the educational system. This interaction creates the conditions for self-sustaining failure, and there seems little value in debating the primacy of either side in terms of causation. The circle needs to be broken.

And it is education that can break it. Teaching is an important, a vital activity – individual teachers, by their individual actions, can transform the lives of their students, or can keep them trammelled in, acting in ways that reproduce inequity. Teaching is, however, still a relatively private activity. Not many people know what goes on in the classroom, even in these times of appraisal and evaluation.

Here is Thomas Moore, chief minister of England in the early 16th Century, principal executive for Henry VIII, talking to a young and politically ambitious young man, Richard Rich, in Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons*:

> MORE But, Richard, in office they offer you all sorts of things. I was once offered a whole village, with a mill, and a manor house, and heaven knows what else-a coat of arms, I shouldn't be surprised. Why not be a teacher? You'd be a fine teacher. Perhaps even a great one.
>
> RICH And if I was, who would know it?
>
> MORE You, your pupils, your friends, God. Not a bad public, that . . . Oh, and a *quiet* life.
>
> Bolt, 1966, Act One

In the play, Moore distinguishes the life in politics, that Rich craves for, from the more private and quieter life of a teacher. I am arguing that teaching now is political: it is effecting changes that can only be described as political. Politics was once defined by the eminent theorist, Harold Lasswell, as "who gets what, when and how" (Lasswell, 1936). Taking this definition, we can ask what is taught, how is it taught, when is it taught, and by whom is it taught? The answers to all four questions will have implications for social and educational equity and human rights in any given society.

What is taught?

The school curriculum is not a given. It is a social construction, that is, concepts such as subjects, disciplines, knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities are all inventions or constructions made by and shared with members of a particular society. As Berger and Luckman argue (1966), we socially construct reality through everyday interactions with others. This view is in direct opposition to those who argue that there is something real or essentialist about the curriculum or knowledge: all such ideas only exist in our own consciousness. So how have 'we' (another construct that needs to be untangled) participated in constructing what we conceive of and accept as the curriculum? I am not here advocating cultural relativism in the curriculum: when our construction of knowledge works for us, we pragmatically accept

it as a reality that we can (and must) live with. The fact that a truth may only be specific to a particular place and time does not mean that it not a necessary truth for social life to proceed at that place, in that time. Nor am I claiming that, because there are no universal theories, that any one account of what should be learned is as good as any other.

The curriculum was once referred to by an English Education minister as ‘the secret garden’ of the teaching profession (David Eccles, 1960). It is now, at least in the UK, a rather public garden, in which politicians dictate what must be learned – picking up on the metaphor of the garden, what must be planted, how it should be cultivated, what design it should take. Much educational vocabulary and practice is derived from gardening – for example, “the kinder*garten*”, “cultivating the mind”, “learning as growth”, "planting the seeds", "time for roots to grow, deepen, and become strong", ". Preparing the soil, planting the seeds, weeding and encouraging good growth are all part of this metaphor. In online education, instructors should take it a step further—pruning and shaping class discussions; “Our job is to maintain an environment conducive to intellectual growth, but it is up to the students to grow” (Larvor, 2006, p 32).

The metaphor allows us to recognise that the distinction between weeds and desirable plants may be down to arbitrary taste and cultural predilection, rather than any higher-ordained distinction, and this also applies to the catalogue of prescribed plants that constitute the curriculum. Why is certain knowledge privileged, as being fit to grow in the minds of our young people, and other knowledge deemed to be unsuitable, and to be weed out? Types of gardens themselves can be seen as fashions that also tell us about types of curriculum. The traditional baroque garden of high European culture, such as, for example, the Schwetzingen garden, designed by Nicholas de Pigage – where Voltaire spent his time while he wrote *Candide*. Such gardens had rigidly designed beds, separated by formal paths and hedges that separate out and classify different kinds of plants, in very much the way that Bernstein (1975) described the strongly framed and strongly classified framing of the traditional subject-based curriculum. Disciplines are firmly bounded, with specialists to cultivate the subject, to mark the boundaries, and to guard the ideological hegemony of the discipline.

The baroque garden was succeeded by the so-called ‘naturalistic’ landscaped garden, pioneered by Capability Brown. In revolt against the formalism of the baroque, these rolling hillsides, lakes, groups of trees – are just as artificially created as the formal gardens. Indeed, in order to maintain boundaries while giving the illusion of ‘naturalism’, the landscape garden use3d the device of the concealed ditch, the ha-ha, to keep out what is not wanted, and to maintain the social proprieties of property. The direct link between the naturalistic garden and the ‘natural curriculum; are found in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who in *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761) attacks the formalism of the gardens at Versailles and extols Julie’s garden, which appears to grow spontaneously without foxed lines – nature, uncontaminated by society, is virtue, civilisation corrupt: the theme is picked up in the book he wrote the following year, *Émile ou de l'éducation* (1762), where a child-centred education is based on Emile’s unfolding nature, rather than on adult conceptions of the forms of knowledge. But the regime Rousseau sets out is in fact structured and ordered, with the freedom of Emile constantly conditioned by the surveillance of the teacher. The illusion of a natural curriculum is a parallel to the illusion of the natural countryside – the ha ha is still there, if less visible.

My final model garden comes from the UK in the 1939-45 war, where gardens became strictly utilitarian – and were cultivated solely for food. The dig-for-victory campaign was designed to cut down on the need for imported food, and is paralleled with the utilitarian curriculum of education strictly for the useful purposes of acquiring the skills and information necessary to become a productive worker.

So formal curricula are political. They lay down what is to be learned, and what is included is one of the critical factors in the development of a proper underrating of human rights. It is a problem that we cannot, as teachers, indulge over-long in the luxury of debating the philosophy of what we teach, because we have to get on with tomorrow’s lessons – we have to get out there and perform on Monday morning.

In Voltaire’s *Candide* (1759) much of the book is taken up with the pretensions of Dr Pangloss and his philosophy that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds – a parody of the optimism of Leibnitz. After suffering the Lisbon earthquake, battles, shipwrecks, the pox, slavery and much more, Pangloss still maintains absurd reasoning of design, cause and effect – “It is demonstrable that things cannot be otherwise than as they are; for as all things have been created for some end, they must necessarily be

created for the best end. Observe, for instance, the nose is formed for spectacles, therefore we wear spectacles."
Had all the misfortunes not occurred, reasons Pangloss, Candide would not have been preserved

> " … you would not have been here to eat preserved citrons and pistachio nuts."
>
> "Excellently observed," answered Candide; "but we must cultivate our garden."

(Voltaire, 1759, p 159)

This practical alternative – down to earth, one might say – is what teachers must do – they must get on with cultivating the garden.

In the formal curriculum, we need to ensure that schools formally teach about human rights – and about their human rights. The UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) sets out their minimum entitlements and freedoms, founded on respect for the dignity and worth of each individual, regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, origins, wealth, birth status or ability: with them comes the obligation (for governments and individuals) not to infringe on the parallel rights of others. It was the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights —civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. It sets out the basic human rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The four core principles of the Convention are

- non-discrimination;
- devotion to the best interests of the child;
- the right to life, survival and development; and
- respect for the views of the child.

The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care; education; and legal, civil and social services.

Article 42 requires that we "make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike". So schools must, through their curriculum, teach all children and young people that they

- they, and all children have these rights, and that they are unconditional. They should develop a sense of being connected with other children globally, and thus see themselves as 'global citizens'.
- understand they must respect the rights of others – that they have responsibilities. This contributes to developing a positive, socially responsible identity.
- realise that they have a responsibility to themselves to use their rights.

These three points – as those that follow – come from UNICEF's *Case for 'Rights-Respecting Schools'* (2008), based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

What is taught is a critical part of the agenda: but in this particular area, it can be argued that even more important is *how* it is taught. The hidden curriculum – the learning experiences that convey important messages about rights, individuals and respect – is critical. Longstreet and Shane (1993) defined this as "the kinds of learnings children derive from the very nature and organizational design of the public school, as well as from the behaviours and attitudes of teachers and administrators!" (p 43. See also Martin, J. (1983), Giroux and Penna (1983).

How is it taught?

How teachers teach transmits overwhelming powerful messages about the standing, status and power of the pupil. Teaching practices vary enormously, but repeated studies show how much teaching is authoritarian, based on a transmission model, and full of discourses that disempower the learner. Take, for example, many researches into teachers' discourses. Galton, Simon and Croll (1980) tracked teacher-pupil exchanges in the primary classroom, and Delamont analysed this in the secondary school classroom (1976). The later observed

“It is rare to demand of people … how you spell rhododendron unless you really do not know the answer. Cross-questioning, checking up and interrogation are rude in everyday life, but the staple of classroom life.” (Delamont, 1976, p 102). These findings show that many interactions, though set as questions, were either forms of social control, or were seeking to test pupils’ capacity or success in absorbing knowledge. It is rare for questions in the classroom to be genuine questions, where the teacher seeks the views, opinions or experiences of the learner, in a way designed to elicit information that the teacher does not already have. Most questions – other than the ‘are you paying attention?’ control questions – are framed to see if the pupil can guess what’s in the teacher’s mind. ‘What is the capital city of Sweden?’ is a very different sort of question to ‘What do you think of Sweden’s record on Human Rights?’

And pupils work out very quickly what sort of questions to expect, and what counts. As a five year old said after her first day at school, her teacher was no good because she didn’t know anything – she kept asking questions (Wragg and Brown, 2001). The teacher’s questions are designed, by and large, to assess, following Ausubel’s model, that “the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him/her accordingly (Ausubel *et al*, 1978, p iv).

Children soon know this. Crawford (1990) reports a study of how eleven year olds strategised responses to teachers questions – what they called (in the area of the world he investigated) ‘faking it’. What he found was that when the teacher asked a question, pupils raise their hands to respond if they *didn’t* know the answer, realising that the teacher was far more likely to pick on a pupil with their hand down. If you *did* know the answer, you kept you hand down, and – ideally - looked rather shamefaced, furtively trying to avoid the teacher’s eye. If picked on to answer the question, one could put on a show of trying to recall the answer, and then blurting it out – gaining the teacher’s praise, and reassuring the teacher that they had been a successful pedagogue. If you had you hand up, and were called to answer, then you affected a momentary lapse – the answer was on the tip of your tongue …. (Crawford, 1990, pp 211- 222).

So: how should a teacher promoting human rights and equity teach? Taking again my cue from the UNESCO

- Teachers and teaching assistants should model rights-respecting behaviour: for example, they should listen carefully to pupils’ views and show respect for their opinions; they should avoid put-downs and sarcasm; they should give clear reasons for use of sanctions; and should avoid use of ‘blanket’ sanctions on the whole class when only individual pupils have misbehaved; teachers should also show respect for teaching assistants and all other adults;

- Children should have regular opportunities to give their teachers feedback on what helps them learn and what they enjoy most about their lessons; and also to comment on what might hinder their learning or not prove helpful to learning;

- There should be a strong emphasis on mutual support and collaboration;

- Children should have opportunities to make choices in their learning;

- Children should be fully involved in the assessment of their own learning and the evaluation of their own work; there should be supportive evaluation of each other’s work;

- Teachers should make use of a wide variety of teaching strategies and routes to learning, recognising that children may differ in their preferences for how they learn;

- Children should respect and value each other’s similarities and differences and support each other, and there should be a low incidence of negative behaviour, name-calling, racist or sexist comments, etc. ;

- The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* gives adults and children a language which they can use regularly and consistently in relation to a wide range of moral issues, from behaviour issues in the classroom and playground to all aspects of the curriculum for global citizenship, such as on fair trade, sustainability and equalities issues;

- The UNCRC also gives adults and children a framework for asking questions about moral issues and issues of justice. This helps to extend and consolidate children's understanding of human rights and wider moral and political issues.
  Questions such as:
  - What rights of the child are involved here?
  - How can the words Wants and Needs help us understand what's happening here?
  - Who has responsibilities in this situation? What are they?
  - Whose rights are/are not being respected here?
  - What examples of people enjoying their rights can you see in this situation?
  - Are there any examples of rights being denied?

When is it taught?

Children should learn they have rights now, solely because they are children. They are not earned or awarded at a certain age. This is of much greater interest to them than being prepared for what they may acquire later in life. They are citizens *now* and not pre-citizens.

By whom is it taught?

Teaching must be carried out by a wide and diverse group of people. I suggest that the teaching profession needs to be representative of a county's minorities. It matters enormously if the teaching profession has few teachers from the ethnic minorities. There are four characteristics of schooling and learning that make this essential:

1. Learning is a formative activity conducted through a variety of processes, some of which are explicit and some of which almost invisible. The processes of learning convey meanings, and *who* conducts this process is an important part of the process.

2. Learning is a social process, located in interactions between teacher and learner, and learner and learner. Designating a person as a teacher is not undertaken lightly and important messages – to society and parents, and above all to children - are conveyed in deciding who shall be a teacher.

3. Learning is undertaken by all children/young people. Many of our other social provisions are episodic and accidental.

4. Learning is conducted over a long period of time.

These four characteristics make it very important whom we entrust to teach. A representative balance of teachers is critical because of the character, ubiquity, pervasiveness, duration and importance of teaching as a social activity. Teachers as a profession must have the capacity to reflect the full spectrum of cultural and social traditions and systems in their collective professional practice. Each individual teacher brings to her or his work a set of cultural norms and expectations. Good teachers are reflective and self-critically aware of this, but none of us can recognise all the culturally and socially determined mores that we carry.

Teachers are a particular and special category: they are the one face of civil society that every child will meet, every working day, through the whole of their formal education. It is therefore particularly critical that this 'face' of civil power be seen, visibly and explicitly, to represent all of our society. This is where such inclusiveness is essential.

It is critical to recognise hat decisions about what is taught, how, when and by whom are political decisions, and that the ability to make these decisions should be part of the repertoire of every one of our teachers. These decisions are critical to the success of learning, and to the kind of society that we need to develop. Teaching is full of decisions, every moment, and the decisions made are not mechanical, technical or value-free. On the contrary, they are the very nature and essence of teaching. We must cultivate our garden, and let our garden grow.

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