A Relational Pedagogy

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Alternative pedagogy

- Growing interest – (DfE 2016) Whatever works!
- Underlying theory, which might guide alternative pedagogies.
- Youth worker – alternative curriculum (ASDAN)
- Teaching approach challenged
“I just don’t get it!”

- ASDAN (CoPE) Teamwork activity – create and market smoothie

- 11 students. Each student identify their individual roles & tasks (e.g. what did you do to ensure health and safety was carried out? What was your main role in the task?).

- The students could not identify individual roles - conceptualised teamwork as managing relationships whilst completing a task as a group.

- They viewed the task as a vehicle for managing interpersonal relationships where there were no perceived individual roles; tasks were shared and swapped according to their value in supporting friendships.

- Students’ concept of teamwork conflicted with that of the assessment requirements.
Is use of language a barrier to educational attainment?

- Assumptions: Language barrier

- How do students understand teamwork & concrete reality? (Freire 1972)

- Explore social worlds of students

- Where, in their social practices do they carry out team activities?

- Step 1 – map relationship building behaviours across a range of activities

- Step 2 - How do they use language to define / signify these activities?

- Enable students to translate own conceptual language into assessment language
Methods: Observing relationship building activities

- 18 months, 300 students + ASDAN 11
- Junior leaders supporting
- Videos, discussions, observations
- Pool, cooking, CoPE sessions, socialising, planning events, eating, playing football, Dj’ing
- Building, maintaining, supporting, protecting, exploring, welcoming
Relationship building behaviours

Building - Two or more students pulling together to overcome a situation or complete a task.

Maintaining - Free expression between a group of friends or trusted adults and working towards a common goal.

Protecting - Assertive claiming of social space by a person or persons towards peers.

Supporting - Extending support to a peer or peers to help them be themselves. An action depicting the words ‘I accept you.’

Exploring - Conscious decision to wait (in social space) until safe and ready to move into another vacant social space.

Welcoming - Negotiated invite to peers to join a group or individual creating a sense of wellbeing (‘thumbs up’).
Language signifying behaviours

- Analysed according to social class (Bernstein 1971)

- Formal language code is used primarily by middle class groups and reflects “...accurate grammatical order and syntax regulate what is said. Individual qualification is verbally mediated through the structure and relationships within and between sentences. That is, it is explicit” (Bernstein 1971: 55).

- A public language code is used primarily by working class groups and “(...) contains a high proportion of short commands, simple statements and questions where the symbolism is descriptive, tangible, concrete, visual and of low order of generality, where the emphasis is on the emotive rather than the logical implications” (Bernstein 1971: 28).
Findings showed there was no clear distinction between middle and working class students’ use of language. However, Bernstein’s public language code was the primary code used by all students from middle and working class backgrounds but within restricted and elaborated forms.

A restricted form of code Bernstein claims “facilitates the construction and exchange of ‘social’ symbols (…) an elaborated code facilitates the construction and exchange of ‘individuated’ symbols.” (1971:78). For example the following statements made by students represent restricted public codes:

1. Cos if it’s good I’ll like it
2. Go away titch no-one likes you, go home

The following statements made by students in an alternative curriculum session represent a more elaborated public code:

3. ‘Like when Alex was on the computer I went to the computer to see if he was doing it’
4. ‘Oh go on Sue can you send me pictures of him?’
Use of a restricted public code

Language was not necessarily located within class based systems as Bernstein claimed. However, the use of an elaborated and restricted public code did vary according to the behaviours they signified and the relationship in which they were used.

For example, a restricted public code, where sentences were short using explicit expressions, was often used within protecting and exploring behaviours.

Students were observed protecting and exploring primarily when positioning themselves relationally with peers and adults within an established social group though.

Tone of voice and other non-verbal gestures signified subjective intent, which also corresponded with the behaviour descriptors.
Use of elaborated public code

- A more elaborated and tacit public code was primarily used during conversations which related to more future orientated goals (such as talking about future plans or events).

- An elaborated code was primarily observed in building behaviours between staff, students and peers or to maintain conversations between groups of students who were close friends or family members and shortly after meeting up at a session.
Regulating transitions

- Language signified transitions from one behaviour to another e.g. *from welcoming* when first meeting a friend at a club session to *chatting* and *maintaining* the relationship with that friend.

- Language also signified multiple positioning behaviours with other peers whilst maintaining relationships e.g. within the above relationship one student might *support* another friend who had just arrived and was upset.
Characteristic use of codes

- Restricted code used primarily to socially position students’ in relation to significant others within an established group identity ie mainly within supporting, protecting, exploring and welcoming behaviours.

- Elaborated code used primarily to build and maintain a consistent narrative story linking past, currently engaged and future orientated focused conversations; the purpose and use of a restricted code predominantly regulated each students’ position and meaning in relation to others within that story.
Language and the production of the self

- The social and classroom learning sites provided a shared space in which to manage and maintain a reflexive (Giddens 1991) self-project.

- Language and knowledge production NOT primarily located within organisational discourses (ASDAN assessment discussions) but within the conditions for the production of the self.

- Whether completing coursework in the alternative curriculum sessions or planning activities conversations naturally it seemed, returned to this primary activity.

- Activities were vehicles enabling this process.
Task as vehicle for relationship building

- Tasks / Activities acted as vehicles facilitating opportunity for students to make sense of who they were in relation to significant others.

- The task of doing the alternative curriculum teamwork activity, which led to this study, critically facilitated this.

- The students used the activity and their own relational linguistic repertoires as a means to maintaining this process. Knowledge and meaning developed through dialogue whilst doing activities was collaboratively produced but related primarily to the production of the self.
In order for students to complete the CoPE assessment I re-located the concept of teamwork into this relational framework.

I.e. Teambuilding activities were located in carefully selected activities, which enabled students to build and maintain relationships – cooking, shelter building, smoothie making, internet browsing.

However, I re-framed the CoPE assessment questions in terms of relational responsibilities rather than individualised roles.

For example questions related to each person’s role in the teamwork process were re-phrased ‘What did you do to help your group complete the task in order and keep the relationships going?’ Questions relating to each person’s role to ensure health and safety were re-phrased ‘How did you make sure everyone was safe so you could keep the relationships going and complete the activity?’
Outcomes

- Significantly quicker completion of CoPE assessment independently
  12 weeks to 8 weeks

- Significantly more students gained higher level qualification 6 out of 11

- Later extended to maths and English coursework
KW has overcome her phobia of school and is now an active student leader at Brighton Aldridge Community Academy (BACA).

She struggled in Year 7 at her previous school where an intense fear of going to school resulted in poor attendance and for the whole of Year 8 she was home schooled.

KW started school at BACA in the beginning of January 2014 and is working extremely hard towards her GCSE’s and despite her turbulent educational past she is predicted fantastic grades and is performing well in mock tests.

The person who nominated her said: “She is an inspiring role model to other students and helps support younger students by encouraging them with their learning.”