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Enw'r creawdwr gweledol (fel y bo'n briodol):

1

Shaping practice: the impact of personal values and experiences

Rowena Arshad

We can educate the next generation to solve many of our problems if we are courageous enough to free them from our own prejudices and anxieties. (Charlotte Epstein, teacher, quoted in Rudduck, 1986:11)

This book is about encouraging teachers to engage proactively with social justice. It argues that teachers who engage with social justice issues are better able to offer pupils an academically rigorous education that prepares them for being a confident individual and an effective contributor both in society as a whole and in the world of work. Teachers who are aware of these issues do not just help their pupils to read, write and attain but are more able to provide their pupils with a conducive learning environment which allows each pupil to maximise their potential.

Research suggests that teacher expectations can be pivotal in influencing pupil motivation (Macbeath, 1998; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). Just think back to your school days and you can probably identify the teachers who motivated you, the teacher who developed your interest in a subject or topic, the ones that bored you and made you think about skipping class, the ones who everyone knew did not really care and so on. Research also tells us that teachers do make a difference when they explicitly address issues of social justice with their peers and with pupils (Connell, 1985; Richardson, 1990; Wrigley, 2000; Kehily, 2002).

Russo (2004) suggests that for teachers to engage in social justice, there are two essential concepts to understand. The first is that teachers for social justice need to explicitly acknowledge that injustice exists in society and that, for various reasons, some people are more privileged than others. Russo argues that it is important for teachers to understand 'how privilege operates, how disadvantage (or marginalisation) occurs, how advantage or disadvantage is cyclical in nature'.

The second concept is that teachers need to believe they can be change agents by interrupting disadvantage and thinking about what they teach and how they teach. One of the most influential educators and social thinkers of the late twentieth century, Paulo Freire, suggested that education can be used either to domesticate or to liberate. Teachers can be agents of change or they can be guardians of the status quo.

For example, by a subtle change of wording, a teacher can change the tone of a sentence or situation.

The *congested* streets of Mumbai...

The *bustling* streets of Mumbai...

The term 'congested' gives the image of excessive crowding and a somewhat chaotic situation. However, 'bustling' creates a picture of a noisy but acceptably exciting and busy situation. Values can be imparted unconsciously through the choice of word or content of what we teach.

The impact of a teacher who is prepared to be bold and challenging can be seen in the person of Jane Elliot. Many of you will have heard of the classroom experiment where pupils were divided by the colour of their eyes to 'blue eyed' and 'brown eyed' groups. The groups were treated differently: one group was privileged over the other (eg. given longer break times, given more praise). It is not the experiment itself that I am concerned with but the impact of her teaching on those children. Jane Elliot brought her students back fifteen years later and it was clear that her lessons about justice had a long lasting effect.¹ Another important lesson that Jane Elliot learned was that on the day that the one group was being discriminated against, their test scores went down, and on the next day when they were being given privileges, their test scores went up. These test scores were sent to Stanford University's Psychology Department for analysis and academics were taken aback at the speed

at which the pupils' academic achievement was being affected by the gain or loss of esteem.

The chapters in Section 1 of this book should assist you in considering why it is important that you to take on board social justice issues as part of your thinking and practice. This section also provides you with the conceptual framework within which to think about these issues – see Chapter 3. The chapters in Section 2 discuss how a particular characteristic such as gender, class, disability or social circumstances (eg. poverty) can create advantage or disadvantage. Each chapter also provides ideas of how teachers can interrupt cycles of disadvantage in these different areas.

A tale of two students...

I have been lecturing about issues of justice and discrimination for nearly twenty years. I want to start by reflecting on comments from two second-year teacher education students whom I had the pleasure to teach – Gina and Robbie.

Robbie asked me why he needed to take social justice seriously as he was neither female or gay nor was he from a minority ethnic or lower income group. He acknowledged that he might develop a disability as he was active in sports and could therefore sustain an injury, so he stated that issues pertaining to physical disability might be of relevance to him. Robbie said that he had never been on the receiving end of discrimination and did not understand the issue in a 'real-life' sense. He stated that he was 'training to be a teacher, not a social worker.'

Gina was in my tutorial group and felt strongly that she 'treated all her pupils the same' and therefore did not exclude or discriminate against anyone. She felt that discrimination would not take place in her class because she was sensitive and inclusive and would not tolerate prejudice or prejudicial views. Gina acknowledged that discrimination does occur in society. However, she believed that most pupils developed prejudiced ideas either from the home or in the community and that the problem lay with society rather than within a school. She accepted that it was important for teachers to be aware of these problems but did not feel the need for teachers to 'go over the top'.

It is encouraging that both Gina and Robbie were able to speak up during lectures and tutorials as their comments allowed me as the tutor to explore the points being made within their group.

Let's unpack Robbie's points first. Why indeed would someone who is unlikely to experience a particular form of disadvantage invest time, emotional or intellectual energy in engaging with these issues? Hollway (1984) suggests that for members of dominant groups to become interested in minority cultures or different ways of thinking, they need to develop a reason to 'invest' time and intellect in these matters. Finding these reasons or personal rewards can be a challenge as they are often not monetary.

Gaine (2005) offers two motives as to why teachers might become interested in social justice. Firstly, he suggests that such investment is sometimes given because of a 'pragmatic motive'. Teachers in this category take issues relating to social justice forward because the law and their professional body (eg. the General Teaching Council) require them to do so. They often do just enough to comply with legislation and their professional framework but view these concerns as add-ons to their core duties of teaching and assessing.

Gaine offers a second reason which he calls the 'principle motive'. The principled position is where teachers believe it is their duty to provide fair treatment to their pupils and enable equality of opportunity as much as they can. For many teachers in this category, it is a matter of principle to grapple with the human cost of discrimination. They recognise that education makes an important contribution in reducing that cost.

As a white, able-bodied, middle-class male Robbie perceived social justice to be of benefit to others but not to himself. In a way, he could afford to be indifferent. For someone like Robbie, Gaine's pragmatic motive may well be the starting point. However, if he is to become an effective teacher for an increasingly diverse pupil population, he will need to develop empathy for his pupils as well as an understanding of how his own privileged position might influence his values and perceptions of reality. Failure to do so would likely result in him not doing the best for his pupils and failing in his duty as a twenty-first century professional.

For most teachers, the reward is not one of financial gain but lies in their belief that they can make a difference. In Chapters 2 and 4 of this book, Laura Mitchell and Helen Knowles discuss how classroom teachers have made a difference by concerning themselves with social justice.

Gina's belief that treating all her pupils in the same way meant she was being equal and fair is at best naïve and at worst potentially damaging and discriminatory. Gina's experiences of life to date, including her personal experiences of family, friends and childhood and previous experiences of learning, both positive and negative, would have shaped who she is as a student teacher, and those experiences will play a part in shaping her professional identity, orientation and practice.

Studies of teachers' personal and professional beliefs have found a correlation between them (Connell, 1985; Smith *et al*, 1997; Gaine, 2001; Pearce, 2005). Causey *et al* (1999:34) describe this prior knowledge as the 'filters' or 'intuitive screens' through which teachers develop their thinking on particular issues.

If Gina is to do her best for her pupils, she needs to be able to reflect critically and constructively on these experiences and consider how they might have shaped her values and views of different people, issues and even approaches to teaching. For example, if she comes from a home with easy access to a computer and sets her homework tasks to generally include research on the internet, how might this impact on those pupils in the class who have either no home to go back to – they are in care – or limited computer access?

Some influences as told to us by teachers

As part of my doctorate research from 2006 to 2008, I wanted to find out what contributed to developing a teacher's interest in issues of equality and social justice. I worked with nine teachers (six women, three men) in Scotland from both the primary and secondary sector. Their ages varied from 28 to 65; two identified themselves as being from a visible minority ethnic group and one as having a disability. Each person was interviewed several times over a six-month period. The teachers selected were recognised by fellow teachers as people who were prepared to champion issues of social justice. Some teachers were identified as part of my work and some were recommended for the study by fellow teachers.

The study identified the following themes as some of the influences that shaped teacher interest in social justice:

- the influence of family and home
- personal experiences of discrimination
- the influence of religion
- the tapestry of self (multiple identities)
- being part of the 'other'.

As you read on, you may wish to reflect on whether any of these influences match your own experience or whether you draw from different influences.

Family and home

All the teachers interviewed found family to be an important learning source. Stone (1988:7, cited by Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:113) suggested that 'the particular human chain we're part of is central to our individual identity'. J Gary Knowles (1992) noted that early childhood experiences, along with early teacher role models and previous teaching experiences, were most important in the teacher's formation of an 'image of self.'

The family unit, particularly mother and father, were viewed by the majority as important early educators and socialising agents:

My mum and dad had a greengrocer's which was beside the hospital. There was a lot of people there – even from other parts of Europe. My dad went out of his way to order, what was then classed as exotic fruits and veg because people had come in and asked him. It was just wee things like that I picked up on. (Teacher C, male)

He [father] had a job which had him travelling around the Highlands. In those days you used to get lots of hitchhikers and he used to give them lifts. At weekends when I was out with him we would pick up hitchhikers. You would learn about other people's backgrounds from that. Later on they converted their house into a guesthouse and there was a wide-ranging clientele. (Teacher G, male)

Some of the teachers interviewed had chosen to move away from the values and attitudes they had been brought up with. One teacher talked about her family being 'quite a racist family, a very white Scottish male-dominated traditional family...' and while she was loyal to her family,

particularly her father; she knew the prejudices they held were not ones she wanted to share.

Other teachers recalled family situations where being the *other* incurred hostility.

My mum who is Catholic married my dad who was Protestant. People have referred to her as the black sheep of the family... Then when I was about 18, my gran died and it was the first time he [father] had ever been in my gran's house. ... - (Teacher F, female)

Teacher F's family grew up in a context where sectarian divides were a reality. These memories have fuelled Teacher F's commitment to tackling injustice and discrimination. While there was no overt home discussion on matters related to sectarianism, her mother, who she named as an influential character in her life, had taught her to stand up for herself and for what was right regardless of the context. This message of standing up for oneself has been interpreted by this teacher, at different stages of her life, as standing up for those less powerful, for others who cannot speak up for themselves and for human rights and justice:

I've come to realise since a teenager I've been quite in people's faces and I know I have got people's backs up. Becoming a teacher I tried not to upset people as much as I typically have done. But if I hear someone say something that is unjust or unfair or things that aren't politically correct, I will speak up.

Teacher E grew up in an area that was largely homogeneous, certainly in terms of colour:

There were very few children whose skin wasn't white in my schools. There were one or two children. So I don't think as a child or at university my friendship groups were very diverse, there were very few non-white faces...

Coming from homes where politics and social issues were discussed or experienced was an early contributory factor to developing teacher awareness and interest in social justice issues.

Personal experiences of discrimination

At least six of the nine teachers described examples either of personal experiences of discrimination or of having witnessed discrimination as they grew up. These experiences acted like bridges, helping these teachers make connections with other forms of injustice:

It's probably due to me coming up here to Scotland when I was 7 years of age. So I was English, with an English accent, ... I tended to get picked on for my English accent ... Yeah and I remember my mum telling me how quickly I was trying to get rid of it, in order to merge. (Teacher C, male)

I grew up and some people have this idyllic picture of living in a rural part of Scotland, well you knew the pecking order where you fitted in ... According to the society I lived in, I wasn't at the top, I wasn't one of the folk that paid for education but I wasn't at the bottom because I was well dressed. (Teacher A, female)

Some teachers in this study did not experience direct discrimination as children but were affected as they left the safety of their families and childhood. One teacher encountered gender discrimination at university:

I was in a drama department studying drama and all of the lecturers were male, two-thirds of the students were female. There were elements of performance in the course and the opportunity for performance for women was absolutely limited. The opportunities for men were not limited in terms of what decisions were made. There was also a case of sexual harassment which I had to deal with and [it] just got blocked by the hierarchy. (Teacher E, female)

Others began to be affected by discrimination as they attempted to progress in their employment:

I work in a university in the northern part of Country X [abroad] which is not where I originally come from. I'm from the south ... [With regards to] Promotion ... if you are not from the catchment area, it is very difficult to rise beyond maybe senior lecturer level. (Teacher B, female, visible minority ethnic)

Whilst having the experience counts, it is the attachment of meaning to that experience that produces really useful knowledge. Only when the experience connects to and positively influences the future does the knowledge it generates become of use. The experience of having undergone some form of discrimination enabled some teachers in this study to become more aware of issues of difference and how such difference can lead to discrimination.

The influence of religion

At least six teachers in the study identified their faith as a key influence on their commitment to social justice. The church was cited as an institution that shaped some teachers' identity and attitudes to fairness and justice:

We went to the Catholic primary school. It's basically that, the values of the Catholic church of fairness and so on ... I think it ingrained in me ... a sense of fairness and one of the things I really hate is bullying of any kind. So it's not really just racism but discrimination of any kind. I don't like people being treated unfairly. (Teacher C, male)

The influence of the church or religion was not always positive however. Two teachers in particular questioned whether the church, as an establishment, or religions in general sat comfortably with the principles of equality and human rights:

When I decided to marry my boyfriend I went to my minister, who had been my minister when I was growing up. He knew I wanted to be a missionary and I had just finished my teacher training ... So when I went to talk to the minister about getting married, he realised I was living with my boyfriend and said he wouldn't marry me. This was about six years ago and I was still attending church and ran youth groups. If this was such a condemnable sin, living with someone who really loves me and who I really love, I think Jesus would forgive this ... – (Teacher E, female)

Another teacher, who is a lesbian, felt that while lesbians and gay people would actively challenge issues like Islamophobia or sectarianism, people of faith did not always support her right to be a lesbian or the right to have a same-sex marriage. This made it difficult for her at times to empathise with people of faith.

Whether they were positive or negative, church and faith shaped some of these teachers' values and views on fairness, justice and difference. The teachers who are practising Christians have gone on to be proactive in their practice of teaching about other faiths and on tackling Islamophobia and antisemitism.

The tapestry of self

Alsop (2006) suggests that our personal experiences and material conditions influence how we construct not just our professional identity as teachers but also our professional orientation and practice.

Teacher A in my study grew up in a small rural town where, as she put it, 'you knew the pecking order where you fitted in.' The first in her family to move into tertiary education, she had never forgotten her roots. Teacher A's life became consumed with class inequality and in conversations with me she displayed a fair degree of intolerance for those she perceived as being from the 'upper middle classes.'

All the women teachers interviewed, regardless of their ethnic, age and social class groups, had stories about the impact of being a female in a man's world. Some knew from the outset that they did not wish to have their choices limited because of their gender, and while all grew up in loving homes there were tensions they had to grapple with. Quite a few talked about the traditionality of home life within the communities they grew up in.

While others were not affected by gender stereotyping, they were acutely conscious that it existed. In the case of Teacher F:

I guess in terms of when I had my daughter because I try not to dress her always in pink, she always gets pink stuff, and just because she is a girl doesn't mean she has to wear pink ... I sometimes think if I had a boy next how much harder it would be for people if I dressed him in pink. People take it fairly well if I dress her in boys' clothes but how bothered people are if I say I'll put it away for the next baby. They always say, 'But you don't know what you're having next'. Well no I don't but I know it will be this size at some point so they can wear it. I wonder if people think that by dressing a boy in pink if it will make him gay.

These experiences gave the women teachers in the study a lasting sense of the injustices women can face in what is still a male-dominated world. Many have become involved in voluntary work or campaigns related to gender such as breast cancer awareness. Only one of the three male teachers in this study commented directly on how gender issues impacted on their personal lives. Teacher C found that his awareness of sexism and issues relating to sexual discrimination rose through discussion with his wife:

Being married has helped, being with [my wife], she sees things differently as a woman and you realise things aren't fair. I think you carry on learning all the time.

Gender is one dimension of the tapestry of self. Other aspects that emerged from the conversations were those of ethnicity and nationality.

Being part of the 'other'

The experience of being different or the 'other' helped some teachers to begin to understand why it is important to promote equality and social justice. For these teachers addressing injustice took on a personal resonance. Teacher H found she had to confront a teacher in her school who was speaking negatively about some children speaking Punjabi. Teacher H is Asian and speaks Punjabi herself:

They will say, 'Oh they are speaking Punjabi and I find it rude' or 'I've told them it's for the playground', or another teacher said to me, 'Oh I don't know why they aren't taken to another school and educated separately, it must be so frustrating for them to be in a school where they don't understand the language' ... A few weeks later I thought how should I raise this, so I took some literature into the staff room on the positives of bilingualism and this teacher again said, 'Well I find it rude', then another said the parents don't want them to speak their first language and all the teachers joined in this conversation. So I just thought I'd mention it to the Head then keep a low profile for a while.

When Teacher H's colleagues were talking about 'those' pupils, she clearly saw herself as part of *those* people. If her colleagues had persisted in being negative about pupils who do not speak English as their first language, it would have had a direct impact on her identity and self-esteem. This created an uncomfortable position for these teachers who knew they could well be perceived as part of the 'other'. The idea of *personal cost* is alluded to several times over the interviews with teachers who have been labelled *minority*.

While hearing about a potential homophobic incident involving some Primary 2 (Y2) pupils, Teacher E, who is a lesbian, felt she had to keep an eye on what happened next:

What happened was a child in Primary 2 told her peers that she was a lesbian. Then the peers and the child responded as seeing that it was something bad but I don't know why the child said that in the first place. When I first heard it, I couldn't tell if it was a homophobic incident or not ... the teacher responded that [the children] don't know what it means. Yes, they are seeing it as something bad or distasteful but I don't know how it has

been dealt with before. The school doesn't have a clear line. If something racist was said teachers would think 'I have to do or say something about this' [but] they don't have that with homophobia. I'm at the point where I want to talk about this, not as staff but I think we need to have a line on it. We need to be good at it and have an agreement on it. I am doing it on my own in my classroom but I think we need to have an agreement on it.

The stories of teachers who saw themselves as part of the minority differed from those of the teachers who had not themselves faced systemic discrimination. Teachers who were from minority groups felt less able to walk away or be indifferent.

A different future

For teachers like Robbie and Gina, whose life experiences have not really engaged them to think of diversity, difference or discrimination, structured experiences will be needed to enable that thinking to develop.

At present, many teachers' capacities to understand why discrimination occurs and how to create the changes at classroom or institutional level which are necessary to promote equity, diversity and inclusion remain under-developed. This book intends to help student teachers and experienced teachers become the transformative and innovative educators they can and should be. That means engaging with key concepts like power, discrimination and oppression rather than being content with more palatable terms like inclusion, diversity and equal opportunities. It also means having the courage to stand up and be counted.

Ras (2004:5) suggests that teachers, 'unlike other less socially intense professions, must deal with their pupils' needs, moods and difficulties while satisfying externally defined goals'. As part of their profession, they are expected to mould the next generation into better citizens, as well as being 'technicians of education, presented with new curricula or standards and expected to be the tools of outcome production' (2004:6).

In the day-to-day reality of survival, taking social justice issues on board can be a tiring endeavour. However, challenging injustice and helping to create a better learning environment or world is something that everyone can contribute to. Cooper (2003:415) found that regardless of whether a teacher was black or white or in a denominational or non-denominational school, it was the teacher's belief in what is possible

that mattered most. When studying the teachers' refusal to accept black children's scholastic underachievement, their commitment to educational opportunity and deep respect they had for black parents and the black community were the attributes that made them effective teachers.

In Chapter 3 Shereen Benjamin and Akwugo Emejulu talk about the importance of being 'explicit in our thinking about difference'. They go on to discuss the social and deficit models of difference. The social model approach moves away from a deficit mentality of 'blaming the victim'. It is an approach that works positively with difference rather than seeing difference as a problem.

Smyth (2004:25) talks about the importance of 'sustaining a pedagogical mindset with which to counter the unequal opportunity structures' as a way of ensuring a socially-just teaching practice and developing a socially just school. Smyth also reminds us that education is about more than just accountability, tests, numbers or targets; ultimately it is about how we assist pupils to 'decode the system', and create school cultures that generate trust and connections with pupils, parents and communities rather than distrust and detachment.

This book throws down a challenge to teachers of the twenty-first century become activist teachers with the commitment to stand up for justice and the courage to speak out rather than to stay silent. Sachs (2003) suggests that to become an activist teacher, the individual teacher must be politically astute and neither risk-averse nor risk-anxious. They should value social relations, move away from individualistic identities to a 'we' mentality and be prepared to question and, if needed, disrupt the norm. She further suggests that activist teachers tend to locate their work in a transformation agenda that requires change not just outside the school gates but within the school and within the classroom.

In his research Fullan (1993:12) found that teachers often say the reason they enter teaching is 'to make a difference in the lives of students'. If that is to be true then individual teachers must recognise the potency of personal power (Macdonald, 2007:132) – that is, the personal power they have to make the difference.

If you ever doubt the impact you can make, reflect on this African proverb:

If you think you are too small to make a difference,
try to sleep in a closed room with a mosquito ...

Note

1 Jane Elliot's reunion with her students can be seen at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6189991712636113875> (view from the start or from 18 minutes to 28.15 minutes).

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