Pedagogy of the Event

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The title of this presentation, pedagogy of the event, could also be, pedagogy against the state, or, pedagogy of the not-known. The notions of 'event' and 'against the state' really refer to the same processes which I hope will become clear!

Foucault's earlier work considered processes of surveillance, regulation, disciplinarity and normalisation. These notions, and others, have been applied to educational processes and policies by many many writers and researchers over the last 30-40 years. In this work learners and teachers are positioned as subjects through specific discourses and practices that constitute learning and teaching, The general argument is that through such discursive practices teachers and learners are formed, regulated and normalised. It is in such processes of regulation and normalisation that, according to Butler, "the viability of the subject, its ontological and epistemological parameters" become established. So to be a 'good mother' or a 'clever child', according to Walkerdine (1990.199), 'makes sense only in the terms given by welfare, pedagogic, medical and legal discourses and practices. These observe, sanction and correct how we act; they attempt to define who and what we are.'

Here the questions of ethics, learning and pedagogy tend to revolve around the norm,

If we impose the power of the norm when it appears no longer relevant to our changing social and cultural contexts and lived realities; when we fail to mourn outmoded or redundant practices and values (Atkinson 2006); then we effect a kind of violence upon difference. We might get a glimpse of this by looking at the imposition in schools of a National Curriculum and its inspection regime which, I believe was underpinned by an outmoded conception of teaching, learning and assessment. This model relied upon mechanistic and transmission approaches to teaching and learning that could not respond to rapidly changing socio-cultural realities. It was in effect a reactionary device trying to cope with a rapidly changing world. However a fourth National Curriculum will be deployed in 2008 which aims to give teachers more flexibility to determine the content and structure of the curriculum for which they are responsible. We will wait and see what this brings.

Foucault's later work moved from exploring the subject as an effect of discourse towards seeing the formation of the subject *in relation to*

norms and it is in and through such *relations* that the self as a human process comes to be viewed as an act of poiesis, a creative and aesthetic process which incorporates a process of critique. This critical position in relation to normalising frameworks provides a basis upon which we might begin to question the parameters of teaching and learning in which pedagogised subjects are produced. Such critical practice introduces a question of ethics in that the critique of normalising frameworks is, by implication, a critique of self in that the self is organised/recognised and constituted within such frameworks. However this critique, I would argue, is precipitated through disturbances, or events, in practice, and I think it is towards such disturbances that Judith Butler alludes when she comments:

> With the help of Foucault's self-criticism, it may be possible to show that the question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility, [those sites] where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed, where one is, as it were, at the limits of what one knows yet still under the demand to offer and receive acknowledgement: to someone else who is there to be addressed and whose address is there to be received. (Butler p. 21-22, my bracket.)

In pedagogic relations it is not uncommon to have experiences in which what happens cannot be understood within established frameworks when we assume common ground but which in fact is not secure. Extending Foucault's writing to this kind of situation where teachers begin to question how they respond to learners when the latter do not conform to established frameworks of understanding, suggests that teachers are in a sense putting themselves at risk, becoming unrecognised within the normalising frameworks that govern their practice. Is the teacher in such a situation risking his or her identity and professional standing by contravening the norms that govern '*the scene of recognition*' anticipated by other professionals (inspectors etc) who want or need to feel reassured. Is the teacher in such situations indirectly asking the question who he or she is? Is she entering the not-known? Does this state involve a questioning of the domain of the thinkable (Ranciere)?

Consequently what kind of forms of address should a teacher as a reflective practitioner find appropriate in relation to such 'insecure' or 'uncertain' pedagogical relations? In such relations it does not seem appropriate to take a reflective or reflexive stance toward the self in terms of a current or future ontology but rather to ask the question, 'Who are you?' This posits the notion that there is a subject in the pedagogic relation who the teacher probably does not fully comprehend. Here the relation to the other disrupts the self. This seems to indicate a tension between representation and 'what happens.'

If in a pedagogical relation the learner is fantasised through the norm, the Other of the norm, then the learner becomes a surrogate identity (she produces what the teacher expects). If the pedagogical encounter begins from the question, 'who are you?' then a different relation seems to emerge and it is possible to turn this question into, 'How does the other learn?'

Pedagogy against the state
The notion of risk taking has often been put forward by educators in order to promote creative and individual approaches to learning (see Swift and Steers 1999). The idea of learners being encouraged to take risks in their specific learning context suggests a pedagogy that is not totally controlled by specified learning outcomes. It suggests a flexible teaching-learning space that attempts to accommodate unpredictable or unexpected directions in learning. Encouraging learners to take risks in their practice, by implication, suggests that teachers themselves are also taking risks in that they have to be able to 'let things happen'; they have to be able to facilitate these learning pathways without a clear sense of outcome. But how can we understand the idea of risk taking? Is it possible to provide a theoretical basis upon which to enhance our understanding of this concept that takes us beyond the prosaic idea of 'taking a chance' and thereby provide pedagogy with a more substantial theoretical underpinning of this concept?

I believe that we can develop this line of enquiry by thinking about real learning arising through an event which involves a movement into a new or changed ontological state. Learning can thus be conceived as a problem of existence as it involves this ontological evolution. If real learning, as I call it, involves a disruption of established states of pedagogical knowledge and practice through which learners are recognised but through which such recognition may also be constraining, then a pedagogy commensurate with such disruption is required, a pedagogy which I call *pedagogy against the state,* or perhaps, a *pedagogy of the event*, in order to expand our grasp of what it *is* to learn and lead to the possibility of forming new and more effective learning communities.

Immanent to such pedagogy is therefore a movement against itself. The ethical imperative for pedagogy therefore is concerned with maximising the power of learning, it is not focussed on what we are and should be, that is to say on some transcendent position towards being, but upon the potentiality and 'unknown' of becoming. An ethics of the unknown, an ethics of becoming.

The caged heart

Caged heart   1   Caged heart 2

A few years ago I was interviewing a secondary school teacher in his art room when one of his GCSE students came in and asked to see him. This was at the time of the BSE crisis when thousands of cattle were being slaughtered around the country and their carcases burnt in huge fires. It was an event which triggered an intensive political and ethical debate. The student was carrying a cage made from wooden rails. She said that she had not made the cage but wanted to use it for her examination piece which would be displayed the following week. She intended to suspend a frozen cow's heart from the cage. The bottom of the cage would be covered with straw and a map of England. Then she asked her teacher if this would be alright and if he thought she might pass the examination. The teacher and I just looked at each other.

I am using this incident as a means of illustrating what I want to say about learning as an event. This concerns a relation between the real of practice and its inscription or perception by others (in this case a teacher) that precipitates ethical and pedagogical questions that open up possibilities for expanding our comprehension of what learning 'is' or can become.

My direction then is to consider an ethics of pedagogy through which learners and their respective learning practices can emerge into existence. It is an ethics of the unknown of becoming rather than established forms of being. I am making a distinction therefore between an act of Real learning involving a leap into a new ontological space,

where the event of learning precipitates a new order of becoming and normative learning as that which comprises much of the daily procedures of learning, teaching and assessment.

A simple description of the Real (Zizek, 1989) relates to something that disrupts our normal frameworks of understanding or, put another way, something that brings to light gaps in our understanding. The Real hints at the gaps in the symbolic, it hints at those moments when our symbolic forms break down, when the symbolic order is punctured, a shattering of boundaries when our practices of representation are severely disrupted by something that happens. If we combine this idea of the Real with an act of learning to constitute *real learning* it designates a risky situation in which ontological boundaries become uncertain or fractured. It is almost as though through this act the self is erased through risk to reform according to a new set of ontological coordinates.

The ethics of pedagogy discussed thus seeks to make room for what we might term localised truth procedures of learning. Thus I am concerned more with opening up pedagogic spaces to the truth of learning encounters and events rather than analysing (normative) subjects of knowledge. I use the term 'truth' from my reading of Alain Badiou (2001, 2005a, 2005b) who proposes the notion that the truth of being emerges from an event through which a subject (in this case a learner) emerges. For Badiou truth is linked to the eruption of an event and its generic consequences, it is nothing to do with existing knowledge or meaning. Truth is not what knowledge produces; on the contrary, 'it is what exceeds, in a given situation, the knowledge that accounts for the situation (Leclercle 1999 p. 8).' In other words truth is what cannot be conceived in a particular situation according to existing knowledge, 'a truth is a puncturing of such knowledge (Ibid. p.8).' We can comprehend this idea of truth as lying beyond meaning or as a void in current meaning. In relation to education Badiou (2005c) remarks:

> …education (save its oppressive or perverted expressions) has never meant anything but this: to arrange the forms of knowledge in such a way that some truth may come to pierce a hole in them (p.9).

For Badiou a subject comes into being through the dynamics of an event and truth procedure that punctures and transforms knowledge. The interesting thing is that for Badiou an event is something that occurs in a situation but it *is not of* the situation, that is to say, the event has little meaning within the current state of a situation (which is comprised of those practices, knowledges and values that constitute a situation, rather like Bourdieu's notion of habitus.) We can get a handle on this by reflecting upon major disruptions such as Galileo's interruption of mathematical physics or Duchamp's introduction of his

readymade objects. Both actions occurred in a specific historical situation but, it could be argued, they could not be easily understood within the existing knowledge frameworks. It is through following a truth procedure leading from an event that, for Badiou, a subject comes into existence. Although Badiou is concerned with the event in relation to such major disturbances in the fields of science, politics, art and love, I think there is some mileage in taking this idea and applying it to more localised micro-events of learning viewed as local processes of becoming in which learners emerge as subjects. This seems to me to be about the production of new form and new formalisations.

In relation to the *caged heart* then how might we comprehend this incident in relation to the notions of event and truth? Well, I think it is possible to see an answer in the pedagogical relation where a local event precipitated a flow of energy. The student was clearly in a situation where she was attempting to break new ground but was uncertain of its validity. Encouragement from her teacher projected her into a highly creative flow in which she was able to pursue and persevere with the truth of her ideas and her commitment to them. There seems to be an important ethical dimension to this whereby the learner and teacher together persevere with their local but unpredictable journeys of learning and emerge through the a deep sense of commitment and perseverance.

Here the event precipitates a relational ontological process, a 'being-with' (Luc Nancy).

I think these ideas on event and commitment can be usefully linked to another term used by Badiou, 'that-which-is-not-yet', from his little book on ethics (2001).

That-which-is-not-yet
The concept of 'that-which-is-not-yet' has relevance for theorising the pedagogical space on two levels: firstly in relation to multiple potential and secondly the idea of invisibility. We can think of 'that-which-is-not-yet' as refering to forms of being that have no existence, that is to say, to being that does not count or is not yet valued. This might refer to emerging states of becoming but also to those forms of being that are often present but absent, that is to say where they have no existence in the sense that they lie outside or are marginalised by dominant modes of understanding and value. In cultural theory sometimes the term 'other' is emplyed to designate this state.

Within teaching and learning contexts it is quite possible for there to be learners whose ontological status is not recognised and so their potential for becoming is constrained and who therefore have

marginalised existence within the pedagogical space. A glimpse of this situation can be gained for instance when children/students produce work that is mysterious or incomprehensible from the perspective of the pedagogical framework as formed by the discourses and practices of the curriculum that inform the teacher's practice. It can also be witnessed when learners from other cultures enter into a pedagogic context that fails to support their previous existence and achievements as learners. So this idea of that which is not yet can be employed firstly, to unpack ontologies of learning. If we conceive of learning as a movement into a new ontological state, that is to say, where learning opens up new possibilities, new ways of seeing things, new ways of making sense of what is presented to us in our different modes of existence, then this movement involves, 'that-which-is-not-yet.' Accepting such new states involves accepting new states of existence as learners. This idea would indicate a space of infinite potential. How can we facilitate and support such spaces?

Secondly, in relation to invisibility, the idea of that-which-is-not-yet can be deployed to consider the politics of existence in the pedagogic space particularly in relation to marginalised or oppressed subjects. For instance, when a child from outside of an indigenous culture enters its pedagogical institutions, though much effort is made to ameliorate this situation, we often find that the institutional framework might not cater for the lifeworld of the child, his or her cultural background or ways of understanding. In other words the learner's existence is not recognised by the symbolic order of the pedagogical context (and may never be) and so the learner occupies a position of, that-which-is-not-yet within this specific context. Similarly within the dominant culture there are learners whose ways of understanding or strategies of learning are not recognised within the norms of pedagogic strategies employed by the teacher. For example, we know from the work of Bourdieu, Bernstein and others, through their theorising concepts of cultural capital and symbolic violence, that the curriculum content of the pedagogic space can be culturally biased so as to priviledge those learners who have access to valued forms of knowledge (cultural capital). Thus those learners who do not have access might be viewed as that-which-is-not-yet within the pedagogical context of state education and sadly remain in this ontological vacuum.

Pedagogy against the state and points of exception
In order to embrace the idea of real learning as a movement into a new ontological state through following local truth procedures, and the ethical implications for the pedagogic space of that-which-is-not-yet, it seems that what is required for pedagogy is a *pedagogy against the state or a pedagogy of the event*. This notion requires some elaboration.

Essentially pedagogy against the state, or pedagogy of the event, is a term which embraces both states of representation and encounters. States of representation affect our everyday lives as teachers or learners, because they refer to assimilated bodies of knowledge and practice. By implication therefore they refer to specific normalised subjectivities that are produced through these knowledges and practices, these states of representation. On the other hand an event of learning, a learning encounter or real learning, as described above, would involve a puncturing of these assimilations and their respective subjectivities and therefore demand a pedagogical practice commensurate to this ontological shift in learning. In other words if real learning is a problem of existence that involves a movement into a new ontological state, which includes the fracturing of established subjectivities, then pedagogy has to support this encounter with the Real. Rather than being driven by assimilated objects or bodies of knowledge it has to try to accommodate learning encounters that precipitate new forms of learning. By implication pedagogy against the state suggests and anti-pedagogy; that pedagogy itself must pass beyond its own assimilated knowledge and practices in order to open up new forms of pedagogy and new learning communities. We might argue that representation controls thought and practice whereas events or encounters open up possibilities for new ways of conceiving and acting and in doing so may lead to new learning communities.

The notion of pedagogy against the state must also include the political state within which education functions and which largely determines educational policies and practices. In this context therefore pedagogy against the state advocates a spirit of critique towards the wider political context that regulates practices of teaching and learning in schools.

Pedagogy against the state attempts to accommodate the not-known, from being to becoming, to challenge learners out of a comfort zone. It challenges traditions of learning and teaching and their objects that may be incommensurable to the social realities in which they function. This indicates a failure to mourn.

We can also apply the idea of a pedagogy against the state on a more overtly political level by interrogating the relationship between pedagogy and liberal democratic policies. Here we are concerned with pedagogy as a form of critcal engagement with liberal democratic economics as the driving *raison d'etre* for state education. Put rather crudely, in our contemporary context of audit cultures and economic policies, do we want such cultures, consumer barons or apparatchiks exerting a heavy influence upon state schooling and its organisation? Badiou's idea of politics is helpful here. He does not use the term

politics to refer to the manoeuvres of political parties and their sponsors but to a process of thought-action that strikes out from normative or dominant ideological forces that perpetuate social injustices in order to create new possibilities for existence. Here it is important to contemplate a politics stemming from 'the excluded element' or 'the point of exception' which serves as a platform for disruption, or, put another way, which highlights the lie of the system through the truth of the excluded. (Ranciere's notions of *Demos* and *Ochlos* can be considered here). Here I am thinking of those disturbances in practice which shed light upon the limitations of current comprehensions of learning and precipitate a disruption of existing hegemonies that regulate teaching and learning practices. I am also thinking about the point of exception as the absent present, those individuals who for whatever reason fail to find a place of existence (apart from a pathologised, marginalised or unfullfilled space) within contexts of teaching and learning. How many learners are in reality sold short?

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