

Cyberlect in the classroom: dialogical approaches to languages

Those who know nothing of foreign languages know nothing of their own (Albert Costa, 2014)

Tess Maginess

Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland; t.maginess@qub.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the question of why and how, as teachers, we might need to develop a more dialogical pedagogy with students in relation to language. I begin by situating this question within the conceptual framework of Constructivism and Critical Pedagogy. I then move on to propose that there have always existed in the classroom – two languages; official and unofficial, before arguing that the language of social media – cyberlect, as I have termed, it, is the most widely used form of unofficial language among young people. The next section addresses some of the dangers of cyberlect, especially in terms of the weaponisation of language. I will then narrow the focus to an examination of attitudes to social media in the classroom. The concluding section of the paper suggests some ideas for how a Constructivist and Critical pedagogy using social media could help both students and teachers to form a Resistance to hegemonic rebranding of language driven by a neo-liberal agenda which seeks to weaponise language.

Keywords: *cybelect, dialogical pedagogy, classroom, social media, weaponisation of language*

Conceptual frameworks

I will draw mainly on Constructivism and Critical Pedagogy as theoretical models. There is much close-wrought debate about the many definitions of and interpretations of what Constructivism actually might mean. However, it is not my intention in this paper to drink shallowly of that Pierian Spring (Pope 1711, 2006) and others can offer far more profound knowledge and skills than I can. My understanding of Constructivism is that knowledge should be co-constructed with the learner – emanating from the premise that learners/students bring knowledge and experience - sometimes experience that would be very far from that of their teachers (Buber 1947, Imel 1991, Maginess 2015, 2017a). This 'endogenic' Constructivism, accords value and respect for the real world outside the classroom and helps combat the social pathologization of so called target marginalised groups (Chambers & Lavery 2012, Gutiérrez et al. 2010, Johnston 2006) and the 'otherness' which students may experience, as von Glaserfeld (1984) argues with playful asperity. As Duckworth and Tummons (2010) argue, educators should be more reflective and inclusive classroom practices which respect equality and diversity are especially important.

Pedagogic Constructivism also argues that the role of the teacher, contingently, should shift from that of peerless expert to a co-learning facilitator. Thus, learning should not be a passive, consumerist process, but an active 'construction' between all parties in the classroom (Qiong 2010). Learning should be dialogical, collaborative (Richardson 2003). The teacher must also be a learner (Taylor 2007). The traditional teacher-centered orientation should more generously accommodate students' ways of being and seeing and their critical insights within a community of learning (Lyle 2008). Concomitantly, there has been a call for teachers to examine their own socio-political and cultural positioning, to develop their own critical consciousness (McDonagh 2015, Doerr 2011, Gay & Kirkland 2010).

Proponents of Constructivist models, sometimes also called active learning, claim that such a paradigm promotes deep rather than surface learning and fosters both creative and critical skills among students (Harlen 2012, Kolb & Kolb 2005, Lublin 2003). Critical thinking, it has been argued by a growing body of scholars, is often sharpened and, indeed made more enjoyable through the use of arts based approaches (Maginess 2017, Race 2015, Rolling 2010, Casey 2009, Darby & Catterall, 1994). This is especially important for 'hard-to reach' learners, or those not coming from conventional or normative backgrounds). Later in this paper, I will return to how arts-based approaches can be deployed to encourage both students and teachers to develop critical thinking, and crucially, as a way of empowering learners, especially the most marginalised. That brings me to my second theoretical model; critical pedagogy. In one sense, critical pedagogy could be seen as a logical outcome of Constructivism in that active learning and dialogical relationships between 'teacher' and 'student' are, almost of necessity, ushering in a set of broader political,

social and cultural questions about power relations both inside the classroom and beyond it. Critical pedagogy is, arguably, a first cousin to transformative pedagogy and, as I understand it, both are centrally concerned with an *uncovering* of latent hegemonic power relationships and subsequently with addressing the inequalities which lie beneath the rhetoric and cultural norms of what we are persuaded to believe is 'normality'. Again, my intention is not to become embroiled in the doubtless fascinating theoretical debates about the meanings of this term, but rather more simply, to suggest that critical pedagogy has never been more important than it is in our time. Since my own field is language and literature, in this paper, I am especially concerned with how we respond to the ways in which language is used in social media by powerful people. I am beginning from the premise that students in schools and colleges effectively operate two languages, official and unofficial (formal and informal). In the present day, this could be characterised as the unofficial use of social media language and the official use of languages which come primarily from a Western tradition of print-based literacy and literature. I would argue that Constructivist approaches and critical pedagogy are of crucial importance, because, beginning at the level of language, students learning through these models, are encouraged to question how different words (and the concepts behind them) can shift, can be appropriated, can manipulate and indoctrinate. Living as we do in a post-modern world, we are all, to some degree aware that language - and the reality it purports to reflect or signify - is not a hard-bite, absolute gold standard, but rather a fluctuating currency, in danger of being debased, especially for economic and political purposes, but also, a priceless treasure; Promethean, energetic, fearless, beautiful, funny and compassionate; in short, an amazing resource for the humanising of us. Thus, I would argue that we need to encourage ourselves as well as our students towards active learning through Constructivist pedagogy and towards a critical rather than transmissive or supine pedagogy. Critical pedagogy has, in the past, enabled people, especially oppressed people, to recognise the processes by which they are 'othered' and rendered subaltern and to resist that process as best they might (Harman & Varja-Dobai 2012, Biren et al. 2003, Carr & Kemmis 2003, Freire 1970). And, for all of us, students and teachers, a critical pedagogy enables us to exercise autonomous thinking in the direction of ethical transformation (Boyd & Myers 2009). As many scholars have argued, teachers need to become much more autocritical, questioning the values and assumptions they bring with them (Riecken et al. 2006, Richardson 2003) and to offer a more culturally sustaining pedagogy to their students, which values and defends cultural pluralism and cultural equality and, contingently, social and economic equality (Paris 2012). With specific reference to language, I will argue later in this article that a Constructivist and critical pedagogic approach could help equip us with the tools so vital to becoming aware of how language is not just constructed by individuals (Jones & Brader-Araje 2002), but can be branded, sold and weaponised through social media to covertly support agendas and hegemonies which require profound scrutiny. Thus, I echo Jones and Brader-Araje (2002) who argue for the importance of applying a Constructivist approach to language; learners should be actively encouraged to question the meanings of key words and to construct these through a critical interrogation, rather than consuming language unreflectingly.

The School of Babel: the presence of two languages in the classroom

As educators, we are constantly negotiating different languages and dialects with our students across different subjects; but, perhaps, we do not think enough about how alien, how foreign, the official languages we use in education are for students. Teachers do not always invest quite enough time in eliciting what meaning or resonance any of these 'foreign' words might have for students. Let us go back to our own schooldays. In the UK we had to learn new words all the time; in geography there were 'scree' and 'fjord', or the gorgeous sounding, 'Saragossa Sea'. Little did I know there was a novel of that name, a writing back of *Wuthering Heights*, which we studied in another class. And little did I know, until my father told me, that the eels he caught in the Blackwater River near Lough Neagh in the middle of Northern Ireland (or the middle of nowhere) had spawned in the Saragossa, nor that Aristotle was the first to write about them, nor that the Northern Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, courting round the shores of Lough Neagh, was to observe them so closely and to make a self-metaphor of them in his later poetry. In Mathematics we had quadratic equations, and in Mathematics and English we had a nearly common word – hyperbola/hyperbole. In one adult education project I worked on with members of the deaf community

around facilitating them to write press releases and get them into newspapers, I used the word ‘copy’ – signifying a written article, but the deaf participants were signing this as an activity involving copying other people’s work. It was my fault entirely, because I had not given enough thought to the particular and very specialised use of the word ‘copy’ in the field of journalism. And that brings me to another aspect of official languages.

Nobody ever thought to teach us to think in an *interdisciplinary* mode and the apparently discrete languages of each subject are still taught in a very constrained curriculum model. We, somehow, expect students to think in an interdisciplinary mode for ‘project’ work, but what are we doing to train students – or teachers – to critically and creatively consider how to acknowledge the subject-specific connotations of words in our official (and often foreign) languages? And, leading out from that, there is the sticky business of how words have different meanings in different contexts, not just between subjects, but between the world of the academy and the school and the real world?

Let us take as perhaps the most stark and apposite example, the word ‘critical’. In the world, the word ‘critical’ is pejorative, hostile even; we try not to be critical of one another as sensitive human beings. But, in schools and academia, ironically because of the influence of theories like Constructivism and Critical Pedagogy, we are constantly exhorting students to be critical; that is to say to question ideas and texts and scientific laws. In addition, for some cultures, where the individual questioning voice is not valorised or is subordinate to what the community or the collective entity believes, being ‘critical’ constitutes a very different way of being; a kind of alien effrontery; something quite impudent and self-important (Wang 2017, Vassileva 1998). But hegemonic Western cultures do not always acknowledge this kind of ‘otherness’ in education, obliging all students to be critical. Education very often reflects and reproduces hegemonic understandings and *donnés*, so language is not questioned. The cultures and outlooks and experiences of students who, by some definition, are viewed as ‘other’ are not always taken under the notice of teachers. (Fiske 1999, Mann 2005).

And, of course, as I have implied earlier, this criticality is often bounded by a hidden agenda of what can be criticised. For example, from some acquaintance with current A level students of literature, I concluded from examining their responses that they are *trained* to look at certain recognisable features in a text like metaphor or simile and enumerate them – they are not asked if they think a novel or poem is any good or whether it is beautiful or ugly, boring or interesting, relevant to their own experience or stunningly different. So being ‘critical’ is often a little circumscribed.

This circumscription of what being ‘critical’ means, is due to the undeniable fact that, often, across the subjects, students and teachers are spangled by a test-driven model where only certain kinds of interpretations and ways of considering these discrete subjects are assessed as being valid. In addition, modes of assessment are still primarily text-based (a hangover from print culture concepts of literacy), especially in summative assessment situations like examinations and have been duly criticized by many scholars (Vali & Buese 2007, Guzenhauser & Gerstl-Pepin 2002, Broadfoot 1996). So, even at least twenty years after the so called ‘meditative turn’ (Friesen & Hug 2009: 63) - in which ‘media today can be said to structure our awareness of time, shape our attentions and emotions, and provide us with the means for forming and expressing thought itself’ and in which the ‘natural’ (and often unofficial) choices of young people are to interface with the internet and most especially social media - educational assessment and, behind that, pedagogy, is still rather predicated on valorising an historical, some would say archaic, ontology. That ontology derives its authority from a print culture, a conception of curriculum as discrete, specialist, expert and, contingently, a model of pedagogy which, despite the rhetoric of constructivism and critical pedagogy, is still – and indeed even more – inclined towards transmission and instructivist or didactic approaches. We reap what we sow and education can sow its own seeds, insidiously; discouraging genuine critical and creative thinking, nodding in teacher education towards constructivist and critical pedagogy models, but in the gladiatorial, test-driven atmosphere of ‘real’ schools, bowing, to a neo-liberal ideology.

The connection between the scuttling back to such approaches and the increasing predominance of the neo-liberal hegemony is too vast and dispiriting a topic to tackle in this short paper. However, I would hazard that genuinely critical students and teachers may be perceived as a clear and present danger to the

overweening imperative of forming, *crème de la crème* - if I may borrow not entirely ironically – from Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), identities which are, above all, productive economically and which do not question the basis or operation of this singular desideratum as *the* goal of education. Perhaps this helps to explain why we have now become so obsessed with precisely measurable grades and standards, even though, inevitably, such exactitude is something of a chimera. I would argue, with scholars such as Barros (2012), Collini (2012), Barnett, (2011) and Jacobsen (2006) that that any notion of education as being about personal development (or civilisation, as it used to be, called, with some dubiety) or about making society better or more fair or more equal is suppressed and rendered subaltern and that we can observe this specifically in the sequestration of unofficial languages in the classroom. Paradoxically, students are ever increasingly navigating their 'reality' and forming their identity through the unofficial language of social media and are, I will argue, being manipulated here too. The contradiction between applying Constructivist and Critical Pedagogical models (despite the rhetoric) and a test-driven 'production' model, is creating a situation where young people are far more vulnerable to the same neoliberal hegemonies. The neoliberal revisionist 'branding' of key words, is, I would argue, dependent for its success on a supine, unquestioning and uncritical form of education which, at its core, is an undeclared official version of the same neoliberal hegemony. As will be, I hope, evident, I am not suggesting that this latest antic is a novel phenomenon, for I will argue that young people, students, pupils, have, over the centuries, developed their own unofficial language as a form of resistance, as an implicit critique of the pedagogy they are subject to. What is concerning in our time is the infiltration of the current unofficial language of social media by powerful hegemonic interests and the lack of research evidence that there is an energetic and imaginative constructivist and critical pedagogical critique of that infiltration in the classroom.

Official and unofficial languages and the emergence of a new unofficial language: cyberlect

Language is as a central aspect of students' specific cultural and economic milieu, a key determinant in identity formation. Historically and in the present time, as I have implied, many students do not come from 'normative' White, middle class backgrounds. And some will speak in a form of dialect at home, as we did in rural Northern Ireland, quite distinct from the correct, official language of the classroom. In this increasingly diasporic world, young people may speak at home in another language altogether. In our time, by a curious paradox, young people now share a new global, unofficial, informal language; the *argot* of social media. This may help to connect students from different cultures, but it serves also to open up a new kind of distance from educators still wedded to the official languages of the classroom(s), discrete curricula and the official, transmissive official language required to be deployed in summative assessments and a contingent insouciance about the 'real world' of the students, what students want to learn and how they are learning it and ironically, 'constructing it' (in line with Constructivist principles) and even critically assessing it and operating their own forms of critical peer pedagogy through their unofficial language. But, we all have to learn and while young people can show teachers how Constructivist and critical pedagogy can operate through the unofficial channel of social media, it might also be argued that there is a role for teachers in sharpening students' natural tendency to criticise the adult world, in western culture at any rate, by engaging dialogically with them in an educative process which also offers some transmissive knowledge, some contextualization of an issue they are discussing unofficially on social media which can foster critical and creative thinking. My point is simple; unless teachers engage with the unofficial language of their students, unless they enter the 'learner zone', they risk subjecting students to the vulnerabilities they decry in their contempt of social media. The dangers of social media are popularly expounded as most commonly, laziness of language – a slackness in grammar and spelling, the vulnerability of young people to trolling, manipulation and blackmail, especially with regard to bullying and the posting of images which encourage predatory sexual 'traffic'. But there is little comment in educational contexts about how social media can be manipulated by powerful politico-economic interests to brand (or, to be more precise, rebrand) key tropes, or if you will key words. I will return to this a little later. At this point, it may prove useful to examine the unofficial language of social media.

Cyberlect

There is now a form of dialect or idiolect which is current among young people; that is the language of social media. I have coined a term for this – *cyberlect*. Whatever name we give it, we all understand that young people, especially, are wearing out their thumbs practising this new, unofficial global language. According to Hughes (2016), nine out of ten American teenagers hold at least one social media account. Cyberlect involves a number of elements; abbreviation; ‘LOL’ (‘lots of laughs’), ‘ELI5’ (‘explain like I’m five’), new combinations of letters and numbers ‘B4’ (‘before’), ‘Gr8’ (‘great’), phonic spelling, ‘peetsa’ (‘pizza’), ‘churoo’ (‘true’) and ‘dat’ (‘that’), emojis or symbols using punctuation and letters, extreme truncation or elision, depending upon phonic pun, ‘c u @ 2’ (‘see you at 2 o’clock’), Evans (2017) argues that emojis are now the fastest growing ‘idiolect’ within cyberlect. This may be due to a number of factors, but one surely is that emojis are congenial to languages like Chinese and Japanese which are ideogrammatic rather than reliant upon the English alphabet. Emojis are closer to this non-alphabetical and non-sequential ‘grammar’ than the globally dominant English. Maybe, there is a little bit of a reaction to that global dominance also, or maybe it is just faster to use images. And speed is everything. On the other hand, I may add that any attempt to register dialect (another form of unofficial language) in phone messaging is frustrated by predictive text exclusion. Thus, it is quite difficult to get through the particular linguistic rules with words like ‘hotherin’ (untidy) or even the rather more common tendency among many native English speakers in different parts of Britain to drop the ‘g’ in verbs like ‘going’ or ‘working’. So, while social media ‘language’ seems Promethean, utterly democratic, even; it imposes its own rules. Of course, rules are there to be understood and then broken, and young people may well know how to get under the grammatical wire.

Apparently, within the ‘APPSmosphere’, Twitter is rendered quite the dinosaur by WhatsApp, Snapchat and Instagram. There is also MySpace, Bebo and Friendster. Next year, there will be other ‘Apps’. The whole point is that it should not be understood by older people; it is off limits to parents, aunts and proxy authority figures like teachers. We are not supposed to understand it - or only ‘soo’ old versions like Facebook and Twitter. Merritt (2013) reports on a Mencap survey in which 89% of respondents believed that social media language (text-speak) was a barrier between parents and children. Kosoff (2016, unpaginated) records one telling response from a young person; ‘I can’t be myself on [Facebook], because my parents and my friends’ parents are my Facebook friends’ (punctuation supplied). A rising star in the Social Media firmament is ‘After School’ launched in 2014, where ‘high school pupils are encouraged to post their ‘deepest anxieties, secret crushes, vulgar assessments of their classmates’ (Balingit 2015, unpaginated). The algorithm prevents parents getting on to the site.

However, it seems, long before teenagers and the ‘generation gap’ was invented, young people in schools developed idiolects among themselves. We see, for example, in Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and perhaps even more strikingly, in L. P. Hartley’s *The Go Between* (1953), that there was, in English Public (i.e. Private) schools (and their Irish mimicked models), an idiolect among the pupils rather different from the official language of their teachers; quite irreverent it is, too, and occasionally, rather ingenious. And there are those who can, I suspect, testify, that vulgar comments about classmates and downright bullying was not invented by social media.

The whole point of students developing their own idiolect is to keep us out, to render us as ‘other’. It is a conscious form of subversion. George Steiner, in his book *After Babel* (1975) talked about the way in which Black Americans deployed and even developed an idiolect which could not be understood by the White, oppressing majority. This subaltern idiolect became a language of resistance, of secret and subversive communication. Of course, that idiolect was subsequently appropriated by Whites, via Jazz and Blues.

And, we may flip the coin on this; as teachers, some use a kind of unofficial language (not always entirely flattering) when speaking about students, especially those considered to be ‘difficult’. There is, then, a kind of ‘off stage’ language practised by both teachers and students and, I suspect, this mirrors what happens in the rest of society. So, for example, we might be very correct ‘in the public eye’, especially to superiors but privately, if we are annoyed (which we all are at times) we might *revert* to a more instinctive and emotional idiolect. Alternatively, in moments of joy and delight, official language may not quite supply what we want to express, to say nothing of more subtle matters.

We may also need to remember that there are many great works of literature which challenge and subvert 'official' language and, contingently, attitudes. The subversive nature of cyberlect is not, in itself, necessarily a bad thing; for subversion, the saying of things that are not approved of officially, in a kind of sub-language, or dialect, or idiolect, can also be a courageous act of resistance to oppressive powers.

Livingstone (2008) makes some interesting points about how young people use social media. She acknowledges that young people have always been interested in the presentation of self, so social media has not invented this phenomenon. She suggests that young people frequently distinguish between the 'self' they create on social media and their private self. She notes that the content is often jokey, an indication that young people view the project of self-creation as reflexive and, indeed autocritical. Furthermore, she rightly distinguishes between different phases of the self-presented or constructed for social media. This seems to me to ring true in relation to the process of identity formation charted in literature, and indeed, in our own lives. That identity formation is not a stable, or smooth process; we 'take on', try out, mimic, a range of identities, often mixed or even frankly contradictory, before, somehow, becoming, paradoxically, unconsciously, ourselves. But even that notion of a fixed, adult identity is very much open to question, as we change or are changed throughout our lives. The question is what can educators learn from this? One important lesson, it seems to me, is that educators need to understand the difference between the literal and the performative, between the private and the public. Of course, they do understand this in classrooms, as they glimpse students 'acting out' various roles such as the inscrutable and untouchable intellectual, the party goer, the risk taker. But how much encouragement is given to students to 'perform' their avatars or, more crucially, to perform roles and identities that are 'other' within pedagogic contexts? How might we encourage students to understand the paradoxical authenticity of the ludic, of play, if we, as teachers, and indeed researchers, retain a fixed, solemn avatar? And how much attention is given to how any of these avatars are socially and culturally constructed? Given the immense importance given to 'child development', how much attention is actually paid to how young people's changing identity formation on social media might be matched with what they need to learn at various 'Key Stages'?

Interestingly, Kosoff (2016, unpaginated) records one young person saying that the appeal of social media was that, 'I also like being able to make stories' as well as to listen to the stories of others. While this is a slender platform from which to argue that young people tend towards, yearn towards what Blatt-Gross (2013) argues, are 'artful behaviors' as an intrinsic part of human nature, there is surely something to be learnt from this in terms of how education can help young people to make meaning, to construct meaning; as they form their identities, they seem to naturally conceive of this process as making stories. We may elicit from this that young people, just like the rest of us, right through to old age and even and maybe especially, in dementia, are concerned with the existential question, 'who is it can tell me who I am' (Shakespeare 1606, 1975: 981). We all 'perform' identities. Social media does nothing more than dramatise this in our time. As I have noted above, this is not to say that young people using social media are always entirely in control of the avatar or persona that they create; my concern is about those who are interested in these 'stories', these 'profiles' for deeper ideological purposes in terms of harvesting 'Big Data'. Might we just slightly be in danger of sleepwalking our way into an era where we do not hear that language is being callously chiselled and channelled towards hatred and division; from the casual acceptance of internet insult to the far more sinister global surveillance of social media (Grassegger & Krogerus 2017) to influence opinion in elections?

The predominant notes in the popular discourse about young people and social media are (1) The disastrous decline in literacy and (2) The risks young people place them themselves at in engaging with social media. The first note is suspiciously pure and takes no account of the general 'decline' in historic standards of literacy. We may blithely counter that language has always been on the move, transgressing previous norms and standards. I will return to this shortly. In relation to (2), there is no doubt whatsoever that there are risks; whether the risks are greater because of social media is a more complex question. Much of the attention has focused on the sexual risk young people are subject to being groomed by sexual predators. This is, without doubt, a most grievous risk, though social media did not invent grooming; as those of us from a so-called more innocent age, can testify. There is another risk, pernicious too, and that is

that young people, being young, are encountering words for the first time and do not always know how certain key words have shifted meaning, or rather, how certain key words have been so reconstructed as to constitute not just a semantic shift but a cultural and political shift of a very dangerous kind. This too, is not an enterprise which can be blamed on social media, but, as we will argue, this semantic shifting can be prosecuted in insidious and very deliberate ways.

The 'weaponisation' of social media language

There are powerful people who are not slow to see the potential of social media for prosecuting ideas which are, to put the matter charitably, highly dubious and astutely attuned to the psychometrics of 'branding'. This kind of cyberlect increasingly inscribes a tone which scornfully dismisses 'political correctness' as a creation of the new bugbear of the 'liberal media' and favours direct attack and invective, often emotional rather than rational in nature. So, the gloves appear to be off, and there are plenty of people who find this liberating; and thus social media can be viewed as a kind of emancipation of unofficial language, unfettered and uncorrected by the Establishment.

We might reflect that highly charged and vitriolic language is not at all new – there are plenty of examples in the past; the pamphlets of seventeenth century writers on religion and politics in England come to mind. Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729) deploys just such an unofficial and 'liberated' free speech to advocate, among other things, that the impoverished Irish might ease their economic bothers by selling their children as food for rich gentlemen. Swift's purpose was critical, satirical; and what he was critiquing was the very danger of a state of affairs in which The Powers that be stir fear and prejudice and traduce honest and authentic criticism of the official language. Politicians are not known for their command of satire, but rather of spin, the first cousin of which is propaganda. Tim Adams (2017), in a review of Timothy Snyder's *On Tyranny: Twenty lessons from the Twentieth Century*, cites the Polish Jewish philologist, Victor Klemperer, who argued that the Nazis commandeered language before they commandeered everything else. Propaganda comes from all quarters; ISIS and others exhort martyrdom and Jihad, their technological weapon of choice; social media. The word 'Radical' here is collocated with Fundamentalist conservative values, but then 'Fundamentalist' in America seems also to be collocated with religious and social conservatism. Could it possibly be that there is some curious, mirroring?

If we are not careful to attend to language – official and unofficial, if we do not question our own languages – official and unofficial, we are in danger, as students and teachers, of being drawn down into a kind of miasma where we do not know who we are. A case in point is how language has changed in the UK and America under a neo-liberal linguistic 're-education' around words like 'socialism' – now a vile, rather shameful label. Now 'liberal' has now also come under fire from the rampaging Right – 'liberal' is collocated with 'elite', with comfortable, middle-class patronising and privileged persons. And, indeed, the latest neologisms include radical liberal (an oxymoron) and 'libtard' (an unappetising conflation of liberal and retard, thus in one fell swoop, 'retarding' attitudes to people with disabilities as well as attitudes to those who have the temerity to speak up for tolerance and inclusion). As for the word, 'radical' - once the equivalent of original, exciting thinking, it has now become a synonym for Islamic fundamentalism. Dare any teacher use such words now in any approving way?

I would argue that young people need *not* to follow the supine adults who consume, wholesale, the fast rebranding of key words like 'social', 'liberal' and 'radical' and, concomitantly, the fakery of fake news. Of course, from a post-modernist standpoint, what we you read in the papers, never mind social media, is rather dependent upon the stance of the source. In the UK and Ireland, it must also be said that the enthusiasm for independent investigative journalism has been, it seems to me, in the last 20 years, actively discouraged, within an increasingly ratings driven model. I fear we may all be becoming, to quote Pink Floyd (1979) 'comfortably numb'. And, as teachers, what exactly are we doing?

The fjord in the classroom: official and unofficial language

Much contemporary educational theory exhorts us towards Constructivist approaches; to be facilitators rather than instructors, to narrow the gap between ourselves and our pupils some recognising how problematic this is in practice (Windschitl 2002). I have written (Maginess 2015) about the importance of

‘entering the learner zone’; of crossing over into the world of the students, attending carefully to how they speak and what they speak about, to learn their language, even though it is, in a certain sense, a foreign language. But this is not the same thing as mimicking students, of speaking their language, wholesale. I think this would be greeted with well-deserved ridicule by students. And to do so would be to deny that there are, in reality, these two languages, official and unofficial and that would be dishonest, for just ‘doing cyberlect’ will not be enough to satisfy any ideal of education – even going beyond the ‘production’ or commodification models to a rather more capacious idea of education as ‘civilising’ or even radical or transformative through Constructivist and Critical Pedagogy approaches, as I have noted above. I return to my opening epigraph: ‘Those who know nothing of foreign languages know nothing of their own.’ We must know the other to know ourselves and, I might add, to expand ourselves, to lead out from ourselves. And, as is well known, the Latin root of the word education, *educare*, means to lead out.

The curriculum – literature as an example

Now, I wonder, if as educators, dabbling, delving, divining, we are not *all* struggling with what Harold Bloom (1975) has termed ‘the phenomenon of belatedness’; that is to say, in matters of language, and indeed literature, which is supposed to reflect the acme of fine language, to say nothing of reflecting our identity, we are a bit behind our pupils. And we are a bit behind how language changes and we are a bit behind about contemporary literature and we are a bit behind the uncomfortable possibility that young people are not at all interested in exploring language through literature and do not do anything so old-fashioned as read novels or plays or poems, but assemble their apprehension of the world in radically different modalities – through the internet, via social media. We are inclined to bend to a curriculum (at least in the UK and Ireland) which has about it a certain archaic, backward looking character.

It is little wonder, therefore, that our students glaze over, that their expressions are impudently bored or chillingly obedient. This has not always been the case – we have had brief periods where the curriculum was more responsive to contemporary work, but then nobody could spell, which was hardly a ‘consummation devoutly to be wished for’, to borrow from *Hamlet*. To be sure, it is important to honour the past, even if it is not our past, but one imposed by the jackboot upon us, because that is, after all, part of our identity, whether we wished it or resisted it.

It is important equally, not to succumb to that age-old appetite for the new, the latest, for it may not be metaphor at all, but only a current, modish sensation. Our students have not invented this impulse; it has always been there. And, in the current zeitgeist, this imperative towards the latest, towards the novel, is very firmly advocated in academia and it is not unrelated to a wider culture of disposability, of the fear of obsolescence. Why is the latest theory automatically the best theory?

Our curricula impels us backwards, counsels caution in the consideration of whether this or that poet or novelist will last, will have any relevance in a hundred years. So we tend to be conservative about what writers we put on a curriculum and it would follow that we still teach our pupils a view of language that is also conservative, official. And yet, paradoxically, writing skills and even basic literacy have declined and it is not uncommon to find Masters’ level students, whose first language is English, making basic grammatical mistakes.

Listening to students’ language: dialogical approaches

Looking at the problem from the other end of the telescope, it is often the case that teachers do not listen to the language that students actually use, to what might amuse, excite and challenge these students. Education is still largely instructional or transmissive and as Lyle (2008) puts it, monologic. If students are not reading books, what are they doing? They are, evidently, engaging with various forms of social media. This is, if you will, their alternative education; the stuff they learn about outside the classroom. We may object that what they are learning is trivial, shaped towards immediate gratification, scandalous, bullying, sensational, emotion-driven, subjective and increasingly infiltrated by ‘fake news’ (Cohen 2017).

My view is that we need to enter the learner-zone a great deal more. We need to question our own paradoxes as adults, as educators. There are no easy solutions, but we might start by focusing on how teachers’ language can alienate pupils/students. We need to think about how we can truly use dialogical

approaches, based on authentic questions, on valuing students' knowledge on co-constructing knowledge with them (Lyle 2008, Maginess 2015) so that they teach us, as we teach them. Young people will, in every age, engender an alternative language, whether that be drawn from cyberlect or from other idiolects, as a form of resistance. But what if we were to be part of that Resistance? I acknowledge this is tricky. As teachers, we might, instead of condemning cyberlect, or other non-standard forms of language, learn from our students. They will not give up all their secrets – why would they – but imagine if we asked our students to teach us? This might not entirely prevent the formation of a further kind of resistance, but, perhaps it is worth a try. Imagine if we dared to challenge the traditional hierarchy where the teacher is expert? So, let us say we are teaching a poem which must be studied for the curriculum. And instead of the usual prescriptive emphasis on dutifully identifying the technical features of the poem, we ask students to text their response in their own language(s) and encourage them to tear it apart, contend with it, and then, re-write it. Suppose we get them to teach us how to use 'click' feedback, suppose we get them to record and upload their version, suppose we get them to use the internet, then, to establish the context, historically, of the poem. Suppose we get them to try and produce a song out of the poem and record that, in their own rhythms and their own language. They will learn immediately, the similarities and differences in language. In other words they will learn to know who they are, by learning another language. Suppose we get students to produce their own graphic novels or documentaries on social issues (Nayar 2011, O'Neill 2017). Suppose, in a history lesson about the Second World War, we get students to teach us how they understand words like 'liberal' and 'radical' and 'socialist' by searching these words using social media. And suppose we then get them to 'hot spot' what these words meant 100 years ago. Suppose, in a lesson on geography, we get our students to share with us what their family in the UK are saying on social media about the impact of Brexit. Suppose we think about how to approach teaching mathematics using gaming, which I gather is very popular. Suppose we involve young people in creating their own resource app, featuring jobs, writing CVs, etc., as they have done in Jamaica (Author unknown, 2017). More generally, as McLoughlin and Lee (2010: 28) argue, 'digital students want an active learning experience that is social, participatory and supported by rich media'. They argue that we need to encourage learner control and much greater use of resources such as Web 2.0 – the Social Web. Furthermore, they contend that social media modes such as blogs, wikis, twitter, podcasting, Flickr (photos) vodcasting and Youtube be not only allowed but welcomed as modes of learning. And they further claim, citing Stabbé and Theunissen (2008) that this kind of self-regulated learning leads to higher order thinking. This certainly echoes the literature on the benefits of the Constructivist model referred to earlier in relation to deep rather than surface learning. McLoughlin and Lee (2010: 31), also draw attention to programmes like the European funded SRPLE initiative which promotes beyond classroom 'learning spaces' which capitalise on the interests and digital competencies that learners possess. And the University of Edinburgh's Global Justice Academy lecture also specifically argues for a critical pedagogy which would promote radical digital citizenship which would be alert to questioning and challenging 'forms of exploitation, expropriation and oppression that are entangled in today's algorithms' (Global Justice Blog 2017).

In the crucial area of assessment, we might think about how students can do creative multimedia presentations for assessments using their phones, as has been trailed in Higher Education, for example, through the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative featuring classroom engagement with WIKI software for collaborative projects and the use of e-portfolios (Dabbagh & Kitsantas 2011). Such approaches undoubtedly help to integrate formal and informal learning, official and unofficial languages and move pedagogy into a dynamic new arena of 'translanguaging' (Baker 2011) and towards a more culturally sustaining pedagogy, where students from a range of cultures and backgrounds can feel more inclusive. Students, according to Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2011), felt that they were an important part of the classroom and that their needs and opinions mattered. And then, we begin to have students *thinking critically* and communicating with us, engaging with us as active co-producers of knowledge. In such a nexus, students are more likely to question the very orthodoxies and vernacular of their own cyberlect as well as the official language that we use as teachers. And this may sponsor the idea that students could figure out how to speak in different languages, knowing the potential and knowing the limitations of both official and unofficial languages. Perhaps such approaches might begin to muster a resistance to the

swamp; by which I mean the swamp into which we are being sucked, where all that sticks up are gilded towers emblazoned with slogans; sad, bad, fake, very bad, new friend, sick. I rather believe that language is a bit more rich, more various, more 'incorrigibly plural', to borrow from Louis MacNeice (1966) capable of showing that we are 'other'. So we must not cease in the quest to know what is other, for if we do, we will drown in a swamp specially manufactured to consume us – in every sense. The importance of language in education has never been more crucial. Let us encourage our students to teach us. Let us put out our hand, that we none of us are swamped, silenced, drowned.

References

- Adams, T. (2017). How to resist the new right. *The Observer*, 19 March, p. 33.
- Author unknown. (2017) Education Ministry to roll out resource app for young people. *Jamaica Observer*, 24 March. Available at: <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/latestnews/Education-ministry-to-roll-out-resource-app-for-young-people>
- Baker, C. (2011). *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 5th edn. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Balingit, M. (2015). Millions of teens are using a new app to post anonymous thoughts, and most parents have no idea. *Washington Post*. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/millions-of-teens-are-using-a-new-app-to-post-anonymous-thoughts-and-most-parents-have-no-idea/2015/12/08/1532a98c-9907-11e5-8917-653b65c809eb_story.html?utm_term=.e53b73ce9eb8
- Barnett, R. (2011). *Being a University*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Barros, R. (2012). From lifelong education to lifelong learning. *RELA*, 3 (2), 119-134.
- Biren (Rarnesh), A. N., Gurin, P. & Lopez, G. E. (2003). Transformative pedagogy for democracy and social justice. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 6 (2), 165-191.
- Blatt-Gross, C. (2013). Towards meaningful education: investigating artful behaviour as a human proclivity in the classroom. *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 14 (7), 1-6. Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v14n7/v14n7.pdf>.
- Bloom, H. (1975). *A Map of Misreading*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Boyd, R. D. & Myers, J. G. (2009). Transformative education. *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 7 (4), 261-284.
- Broadfoot, P. (1996). Educational assessment: the myth of measurement. In P. Woods (Ed.), *Contemporary Issues in Teaching and Learning* (pp. 203-230). London/New York: Routledge.
- Bruner, J. (1983). *Child's Talk: Learning to Use Language*. New York: Norton.
- Buber, M. (1947). *Between Man and Man*. New York: Macmillan.
- Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. (2003). *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Casey B. (2010). Arts-based inquiry in nursing education. *Contemporary Nurse*, 32 (1-2), 69-82.
- Chambers, D. J. & Lavery, S. (2012). Service learning: A valuable component of pre-service teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37 (14), 128-137.
- Cohen, N. 2017. The truth is out there. . . somewhere. *The Observer* (The New Review), 21 May, p. 33.
- Collini, S. (2012). *What are Universities For?* London: Penguin.
- Costa, A. (2014). Those who know nothing of foreign languages know nothing of their own. *Eurosala 24, Book of Abstracts*. Available at: https://www.york.ac.uk/media/educationalstudies/eurosala/Book%20of%20abstracts%2026_aug_14.pdf.
- Dabbagh, N. & Kitsantas, A. (2011). Personal Learning Environments, Social Media and Self-Regulated Learning: A Natural Formula for Connecting Formal and Informal Learning. *Internet and Higher Education*, 15 (1), 3-8.
- Darby, J. T. & Catterall, J. S. (1994). The fourth R: The arts and learning. *Teachers College Record*, 96 (2), 299-328.
- Doerr, E. (2011). Cognitive dissonance in international service learning. In B. J. Porfilio & H. Hickman (Eds.), *Critical Service Learning as Revolutionary Pedagogy: A Project of Student Agency in Action* (pp. 71-93). Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing.
- Duckworth, V. & Tummons, J. (2010). *Contemporary Issues in Lifelong Learning*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Education.
- Evans, V. (2017). *The Emoji Code: The Linguistics behind Smiley Faces and Scaredy Cats*. London: Michael O'Mara Books Ltd.
- Fiske, E. (1999). *Champions of change: the impact of the arts on learning*. Washington, DC: Arts Education partnership, The President's Committee on the arts and humanities. Available at: <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/champions/pdfs/champsreport.pdf>.
- Friesen, N. & Hug, T. L. (2009). The mediatic turn: Exploring concepts for media pedagogy. In L. Lundby (Ed.), *Mediatization: Concept, Changes, Consequences* (pp. 63-81). New York: Peter Lang.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.

- Gay, G. & Kirkland, K. (2010). Developing cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection in preservice teacher education. *Theory into Practice*, 42 (3), 181-187.
- Global Justice Blog (2017). Towards a radical digital citizenship in digital education. *Global Justice Academy, School of Education*, Edinburgh, 16 June. Available at: www.globaljusticeblog.ed.ac.uk/2017/06/26/towards-a-radical-digital-citizenship-in-digital-education/.
- Grassegger, H. & Krogerus, M. (2017). The Data That Turned the World Upside Down. *Motherboard*, 28 Jan. Available at: https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/how-our-likes-helped-trump-win
- Guzenhauser, M. G. & Gerstl-Pepin, C. I. (2002). Guest editors' introduction: The shifting context of accountability in North Carolina and the implications for arts-based reform. *Educational Foundations*, 16, 3-14.
- Gutiérrez, K. D., Arshad, A. & Henríquez, C. (2010). Syncretism and hybridity: Schooling, language, and race and students from non-dominant communities. In M. W. Apple, S. J. Ball & L. A. Gandin (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Education* (pp. 358-369). London and New York: Routledge.
- Harlen, W. (2012). On the relationship between assessment for formative and summative purposes. In J. Gardner (Ed.), *Assessment and Learning* (pp. 87-102). London: Sage. (2nd edition).
- Harman, T. & Varga-Dobai, K. (2012). Critical performative pedagogy: emergent bilingual learners challenge local immigration issues. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 14 (2), 1-17. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/The%20Boss/Downloads/512-3436-1-PB.pdf;file:///C:/Users/The%20Boss/Downloads/512-3436-1-PB.pdf.
- Hartley, L. P. (1953). *The Go-Between*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Hughes, B. (2016). How social media is reshaping today's education system. *Entrepreneur*, 1 April. Available at: <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/273044>.
- Igwebuike, T. B., Okandeji, C.O. & Ekwevugbe, A. O. (2013). Teacher educators' conception of teaching and learning in teacher education institutions. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 2 (2), 43-52.
- Imel, S. (1991). Collaborative learning in adult education. *ERIC Digest*, 13. Available at: <https://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9220/adult.htm>.
- Jacobsen, B. (2006). The concept of public enlightenment. In P. Jarvis (Ed.), *From Adult Education to the Learning Society: 21 Years From the International Journal of Lifelong Education* (pp. 395-407). London and New York: Routledge.
- Johnston, R. (2006). Adult learning for citizenship: Towards a reconstruction of the social purpose tradition. In P. Jarvis (Ed.), *From Adult Education to the Learning Society: 21 Years From the International Journal of Lifelong Education* (pp. 408-428). London and New York: Routledge.
- Jones, M. G. & Brader-Araje, L. (2002). The impact of constructivism on education: Language, discourse and meaning. *American Communication Journal*, 5 (3), unpagged. Available at: <http://ac-journal.org/journal/vol5/iss3/special/jones.pdf>.
- Joyce, J. (1916). *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: B.W. Huebsch.
- Kolb, A. & Kolb, D. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 4 (2), 193-212.
- Kosoff, M. (2016). Dozens of teenagers told us what's cool in 2016 — these are their favorite (and least favorite) apps. *Business Insider UK*. Available at: <http://uk.businessinsider.com/teens-favorite-apps-in-2016-2016-1?r=US&IR=T/#teens-are-shy-to-talk-about-how-much-time-they-spend-on-their-phones-but-its-a-lot-1>.
- Liaw, M. L. & English, K. (2013). Online and Offsite: Student-Driven Development of the Taiwan–France Telecollaborative Project beyond These Walls. In M. N. Lamy & K. Zourou (Eds.), *Social Networking for Language Education* (pp. 158-176). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Livingstone, S. (2008). Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression. *New Media and Society*, 10 (3), 393-411.
- Lublin, J. (2003). *Deep, surface and strategic approaches to learning*. Dublin: University College Dublin, Centre for Teaching and Learning. Retrieved from <https://owa.qub.ac.uk/owa/>.
- Lyle, S. (2008). Dialogic teaching: Discussing theoretical contexts and reviewing evidence from classroom practice. *Language and Education*, 22 (3), 222-240.
- MacNeice, L. (1966). 'Snow'. In *Collected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, p. 30.
- McDonagh, K. (2015). Performing critical consciousness in teaching: Entanglements of knowing, feeling and relating (2015). Doctoral Dissertations May 2014 - current. 383. Available at: http://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_2/383.
- McLoughlin, C. & Lee, J. W. (2010). Personalised and self-regulated learning in the Web 2.0 era: International exemplars of innovative pedagogy using social software. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 26 (1), 28-43.

- Maginess, T. (2015). Crossing borders as a paradigm for innovative practice. *NTF Innovative Pedagogies*. York: Higher Education Academy. Available at: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/crossing-borders-paradigm-innovative-practice>.
- Maginess, T. (2017). 'Crossin' the Bridge: A participatory Approach to Filmmaking. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 154, 39-48.
- Mann, S. J. (2005). Alienation in the learning environment: a failure of community? *Studies in Higher Education*, 30 (1), 43-55.
- Merritt, A. (2013). Text-speak: Language evolution or just laziness? *The Telegraph*, 3 April.
- Nayar. P. K. (2011). Towards a postcolonial critical literacy: Bhimayna and the Indian graphic novel. *Studies in South Asian Film and Media*, 3 (1), 3-21.
- O'Neill, L. (2017). Graphic novel draws on NI's [Northern Ireland's] bonfire culture for thought-provoking tale. *Belfast Telegraph*, 19 September, p. 15.
- Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41 (3), 93-97.
- Pope, A. (1711). *An Essay on Criticism*. In P. Rogers (Ed.) (2006), *The Major Works of Alexander Pope* (pp. 17-39). Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Qiong, J. (2010). A brief study on the implication of constructivism teaching theory on classroom teaching reform in basic education. *International Education Studies*, 3 (2), 197-199.
- Race, P. (2015). *The Lecturer's Toolkit*. London: Routledge.
- Richardson, V. (2003). Constructivist pedagogy. *Teachers College Record*, 105 (9), 1623-1640. Available at: <http://www.users.miamioh.edu/shorec/685/readingpdf/constructivist%20pedagogy.pdf>.
- Riecken, T., Conibear, F., Michel, C., Lyall, J., Scott, T., Tanaka, M., Stewart S., Riecken, J. & Strong-Wilson, T. (2006). Resistance through Re-presenting culture: Aboriginal student filmmakers and a participatory action research project on health and wellness. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 29 (1), 265-286.
- Rolling, J. H. (2010). A paradigm analysis of arts-based research and implications for education. *Studies in Art Education*, 51 (2), 102-114.
- Shakespeare, W. (1606; 1975). *King Lear*. New York: Avenel Books, p. 981.
- Steiner, G. (1975). *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swift, J. (1729). *A Modest Proposal For preventing the Children of Poor People From being a Burthen to Their Parents or Country, and for making them Beneficial to the Public*. London: S. Harding.
- Taylor, R. (2007). Is adult education a discipline? In B. Connolly, T. Fleming, D. McCormack & A. Ryan (Eds.), *Radical - Learning for Liberation 2* (pp 57-77). Maynooth Co Kildare, Republic of Ireland: Maynooth Adult and Community Education.
- Valli, L. & Buese, D. (2007). The changing roles of teachers in an era of highstakes accountability. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44 (3), 519-558.
- Vassileva, I. (1998). Who am I/who are we in academic writing? *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8 (2), 163-185.
- Von Glaserfeld, E. (1984). An introduction to radical constructivism. In P. Watzlawick (Ed.), *The Invented Reality* (pp. 17-40). New York: Norton.
- Wang, J. (2017). A comparative study of the use of self-mentions in doctoral theses by L1 and L2 English Writers in China and the UK. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Queen's University, Belfast.
- Windschitl, M. (2002). Framing constructivism in practice as the negotiation of dilemmas: An analysis of the conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and political challenges facing teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 72 (2), 131-175. Available at: <http://cepa.info/3898>.