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Can 'money' help teach citizenship to our children?

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'I am not a puppet!', 'Sandpit stories!' shouts Jérémy, who presides over the 'class counsel'², in the hope of not losing too much time. This is the last Saturday morning of the period³, and the schedule is rather full. I am sitting within a circle of pupils in a Priority Network of Education class whose teacher works according to the pedagogy of Freinet (1950). Learning is carried out through the activities of the pupils themselves, and the success of this 'natural method' rests on institutions like the 'class counsel', 'what's new', the class fund, class correspondence and class magazine. This class includes three levels - third, fourth, and fifth grades (children from eight to eleven years old). The teacher, Sylvain Connac, is silent and does not allow himself to intervene, but the pupils may ask him for advice or about a technical point. Everyone tries to go directly to the point, urged on by the Chairman. The morning cannot end without the largely unknown institution I discuss here: the 'market' during which the children are able to spend the 'currency' which is in circulation in Balard school (and which was named after a 19th century chemist from Montpellier). This currency is called the 'bal'. This 'wage' and the manner of spending it raises questions in terms of the acquisition of citizenship: should we allow the pupils receive a 'payment' which depends on their achievement and their conduct, and which they may exchange when they go shopping at their 'market' within the classroom? What kind of attitude toward knowledge will they develop if they become used to cashing in on, and even negotiating, the fulfilment of the objectives of their individualised programme of training in institutional pedagogy (PIDAPI)?

Ten minutes before the end of the morning session Sylvain Connac asks the pupils 'to prepare the shops'. The pupils move about. Each of four teams lays out their few treasures, figurines mainly, on the tables. I notice the shocking presence of a dagger and two plastic grenades. At the signal 'the market is opened', there is such a rush that Sylvain Connac decides to close the counter that was to provide delicacies left over from the winter sport class. I am surprised to see that the teacher then disappears from the classroom. The verbal exchanges are making progress, but few goods are sold or bought. Sylvain returns and immediately asks the children to close up and put away the shops, and then to prepare the following activity - an evaluation of mediation in the school.

My observation is likely to be superficial and disappointing because it is too specific, but it provides an opportunity to raise some questions about this practice, in particular in its social aspect and about the citizenship dimensions:

¹ I cordially thank Sylvain Connac and all the actors of Mosson educational priority network (REP) who seek with us to explain and understand the functioning of priority education.

² This is a weekly meeting of the pupils which enables them to decide the rules of operation and to review any problems in progress. It is chaired by a pupil, another being the secretary.

³ Every two months, the teams consisting of six to seven pupils are recomposed for a new period.

- does converting school achievement and conduct into money contribute to teaching the rules of life in society?
- do the children in such class distinguish public from private spaces if their exchanges are regulated by monetary rewards and fines?
- is the teacher's task facilitated by this innovation (dating back to 1955), in particular with respect to teaching citizenship?

It is in this order that I will briefly approach these questions. My paper is based on my observation of the class, discussions with the children and the teacher, documentary research, and the electronic mail exchanges between teachers of the Freinet movement, who are themselves divided by these approaches.

Is the class a society?

In August 2002 the electronic discussion list⁴ of the Freinet movement was enthusiastically *for* the 'currency', with the ayes and the nays winning over most of the undecided. It was the question of payment for school effort which was the most debated. The ultimate aim is to reach a non-commercial stake in the 'attitude towards knowledge' (Charlot, 1997), but some insist on the necessity of going through a transitory phase during which motivation will be provided by means of the 'wage' (which should not be confused with a 'reward', because, as noted from the email exchanges, 'any work deserves some wage'). However, in a priority zone or network of education it is obvious that the meaning for this in the school context 'is not given', it has to be acquired. Family structures, the values of reference and life in local society favour the acquisition of material property such as cars or shoes over that of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1993). Those opposed to the method do not accept the insertion into their teaching a perverse system which deceives the pupil about the results of his efforts: 'At school, the pupil works *for himself*, and I think that to pass on this concept is one of the paramount missions of the teacher'.

What can be said about the class of Sylvain Connac? The children knew perfectly well where they stood in this commercial world, and what they learned was not to accumulate capital but to manage value. Other elements, only detectable after close observation, must be taken into consideration: thus the way in which the 'bals' are acquired is directly related to the pedagogy based on a contract and upon respect for the individual objectives laid down with Sylvain, which are then indexed in a card of evaluation. Contrary to some fears expressed in the email discussions, I found the difficulty of the practical observation of the 'currency' effects was rather reassuring insofar as it established that this method acts as a means and not an end. The children are neither frenetic nor compulsive: they manage a program of acquisition which is also regulated by other institutions, for instance like the 'belts' that result from the martial arts and determine qualification levels. In this class and in this school, the contradiction is reduced between the work which 'is never paid' by summative evaluation, and the certification of a level which is sometimes not overt in the efforts made by teachers not to discourage those children who would get very low grades.

⁴ This is a list reserved for subscribers who discuss through electronic mail.

If the class and the school are the second place of socialisation, then one wonders if the introduction of this 'currency' is a mediator like any 'teaching trick' which is intended to be used as a support that is not only incentive but also structural of the dichotomy of the school evaluation (Barbier, 1984) which requires effort but only rewards success.

Public and private space; what place for the economy in the state school?

The object of my observations was to study this device. We know that the French Republic, following the example of *res publica Romana*, rests completely on the exclusion of money from the business of the city. It is necessary to seek its bases in the Judeo-Christian vision of the world where Jesus drives out the merchants from the temple. But if this is so, do we have to reintroduce them within the French state school and, in the long term, in teaching citizenship in Europe? Célestin Freinet, though reluctantly, had to resort to private teaching to be able to institute his convictions about teaching, having been regarded in some quarters as someone likely to ruin the foundations of the National Education founded on the Jacobine pyramid and the identical reproduction of undifferentiated teaching. Teaching citizenship in France, and in Europe, could not stand against the essential concept of 'public property' which takes precedence over 'private interests'. In the expansion of the institutions which characterise the Freinet movement and even more the 'institutional pedagogy' (Vasquez, 1971), how do children distinguish public spaces in order to build the concept of 'law' imposing a 'categorical imperative' (Kant, 1785) if everything can be bought at the 'market'? Does this not pave the way to a negotiated, individualised and liberal construction of the world?

One constantly finds this polemic against what is seen as a mercenary attitude in the electronic discussions: 'I also remind you that voluntary work exists. Without the thousands of volunteers who are involved in associations, how could the latter function?' My observations of the class did not suggest an answer; neither did the institution of the 'currency' which confirms that everything can be made money out of. The children are in the world of the exchange, and one can see the drift highlighted by François Dubet (1991): liberalism holds the place of social regulator and the students can do anything provided that their results (without considering the manner they obtained them) enable them to obtain the diplomas which they came to seek in the Lycée. This was exemplified by one of the contributors to the email discussion: 'When is the time of the stock-options in Pre-school 'to train' to future life?' Without being quite so virulent, it should be acknowledged that one of the major unsolved issues of the pedagogies resulting from new education resides in their incapacity to be located politically in a republican logic for the common good. I suggest that it is this issue which is the root of the violent polemics which oppose republicans and pedagogues in France. Removal of this bone of contention would contribute to the reinforcement of the educational camp, which could then cease wasting time and energy opposing each other while supporters of the market economy turn education into a commodity.

An innovation which is in line with an overall teaching approach?

The 'currency' institutes value and this value is independent, it is claimed, from the balance of power and influence and the frailties of one another. It is somewhat akin to the difference between a chore in the classroom ('go and change the water') and a trade ('teacher, I must change the water'). This establishes what Francis Imbert (1994) constantly underlines: what is at stake essentially is not abiding by the law (the class

counsel, the what's new, etc.) but active learning. What part does active learning play in the 'currency' that cannot be found anywhere else and which belongs to education? This story of value is of primary importance: in France the results of the pupils are on average 25% lower in the priority education zone than they are elsewhere. The withdrawal of discouraged teachers can be located in an educational policy which believes that pupils should only enjoy pleasure while attending school. But then, what value should we attribute to the school that gives less to those who already have less?

During the whole morning I spent with the class I never heard Sylvain Connac raise his voice, nor emphasise his status as an adult; still less did he employ an authority which would have been easy to conceal as the democratic authorities would have been window-dressing to conceal his influence on the class (Cifali, 1994). There may be a clue to the reasons for this in that part of the counsel is devoted to 'criticisms'. These are initially written on a sheet hung behind the door of the classroom and are considered only if the name of the person making the criticism is registered and if efforts at private conciliation have failed. To his great astonishment, Sylvain was criticised, but Sofiane, who had registered the complaint on the 'fridge' (the name given to the small poster) withdrew it at the last minute. We will never know the origin of this mention, but it attests that although the teacher is the one who has more knowledge (the *magister*), s/he is not the one who dominates (the *dominus*).

It is thus that 'currency' plays its role. It provokes the idea that nothing is arbitrary and everything has a value. That urgency and violence always bring neglect, whereas the enduring nature of education - the rhythmic repetition of periods of training and periods of reflection - help build up one value before replacing it with another: 'the currency intervenes from a different point of view, which means that it is meant to be an additional opportunity offered to the children, in the long run, so as to reach the degree of maturity that we aim at'.

It is not sufficient to observe the outcomes of a process, nor even to interview the participants, as the sociologists of education do. An ethnographic approach is essential: first to discuss with everyone concerned, to enter the school and the classroom, to put the question of the naive, to listen to the answers of other people, to note carefully what is done and what is said, then to go back to the protagonists of the educational action in order to solve *a posteriori* the mystery of their action with them, a mystery for them as well as the researcher, avoiding carefully depriving them of the intelligence of action as long as they are the only ones to hold it.

Conclusion

I would like to situate this work in a wider corpus of research that we undertook four years ago with the teachers, the trainers and a team of researchers whom I coordinated with Dominique Bucheton (Chabanne, 2002): our concern was to understand and describe as minutely as possible what occurs in a priority network of education. This work of didactic, social and clinical description is about to lead to a first publication which will show the interaction between pedagogy, didactics, the training of schoolteachers and the school organisation in order to try to counterbalance the negative effects of an urban segregation the republican school deserves to fight. The 'currency' observed in Sylvain Connac's classroom is one of very many 'teaching tricks' that have been worked out during the history of 'the new education'. Its effectiveness is difficult to determine but it is essential

to study its construction and functioning, and it is necessary to pinpoint its undeniable advantages in addition to the problems it poses.

Within a network devoted to teaching citizenship in Europe, I believe that it is urgent to raise questions about the relevance of a commercial dimension in schools, even if it is temporary. The questions which were posed in the email discussion testify of the vigilance of teaching militants, even if the opposition is not systematic. That should encourage us as researchers who are socially committed to present some hypotheses on the contribution of an active pedagogy, founded on institutions which make it possible to co-build the sense of the city, and with the emancipation of pupils who would be, without it, in the position of the dominated, the next to be eliminated from the education system, and ideal victims for the exploitation of their labour in the workforce. In these days of hesitation between recognition of complexity and abusive simplification (Étienne, 2000), the observation and the study of devices resting on active methods in classrooms and in schools seem to me more than ever the best response to those who would like to make significant savings on research in the development of education.

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