

The Educational Legacy of Paulo Freire

Social Sciences

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Abstract

Paul Freire was one of the most influential educational thinkers of the twentieth century. His work on critical pedagogy and adult literacy continues to shape our educational system. The article is an attempt to explain his basic educational teachings with regard to education in Balochistan. His teachings on education as a political act, banking concept of education and critical consciousness are explained. Freire had particular sympathy for the oppressed people of the developing countries whose cause he advocated in his writing. The article has mainly used secondary sources for the conduct of research.

Keywords: Banking-concept, Consciousness, Dialogue, Oppressed, Pedagogy,

Introduction

Paulo Freire was one of the most important educational thinkers of the twentieth century. Born in Brazil in 1921, Freire is renowned for his work on critical pedagogy and adult literacy. His book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* published in 1968 is one of the most widely read books on education. Freire had particular sympathy for the poor, hungry and the slum dwellers of Brazil and the world. Many consider Freire a radical Utopian and a revolutionary in the field of education. The themes and concepts that he advocated and introduced in the twentieth century are still relevant.

Freire trained as a lawyer, worked as a school teacher and then became the director of education in Brazil. He also worked in many Brazilian Universities on adult literacy programmes. After the 1964 Coup d'état in

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Brazil, Freire moved to Chile, then to Geneva but returned to Brazil in the 1980's. The enduring legacy of Paulo Freire has been the ideas on education that he espoused in his seminal book "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed". Freire's work can be viewed from several angles and the amount of literature that he produced in his lifetime is difficult to decipher in a single article. However, the core of his basic teachings can be viewed here with a certain perspective.

Education as a Political Act

According to Paulo Freire education is always a political act. All forms of education are political whether or not teachers acknowledge the politics in their worked (Leonard, McLaren, p-26). The subjects and curriculum that is taught to students can be viewed as political in nature. We witnessed it in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, that a particular ideology was expounded to the masses. In a democratic society the machinations of the state and bureaucracy are more subtle and hard to decode. The modern education cringes at the implications of education being a political act but for Paulo Freire it is a definite phenomenon. Freire recognized that all education perpetuate political values, beliefs, myths and meanings about the world (Darder, p-8). Freire saw that education is used as a tool by the elite to elude the common people from their rights in order to maintain the status quo. Freire asks the teacher to play their role for the emancipation of the oppressed classes. Teachers and students must be made aware of the 'politics' that surround education. The way students are taught and what they are taught serves as a political agenda (Bruno).

Banking Concept of Education

Freire calls the system of education in which the students silently listen to the teacher while he/she explains the facts as a banking concept of education. It is one of Freire's most influential ideas that the students merely exist as passive entities to be filled in by the depositor. Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor (Freire, p-72). Knowledge has been reduced to a habit of depositing facts and information.

As opposed to banking concept of education Freire advocates the problem posing and liberating aspects of education. Education can either be used as an element of liberation or oppression. An education in which the students are not passive listeners, but are actively re-creating the world around themselves. Problem-posing education encourages students to become active in thinking about and acting upon the world (Bartlett). Freire states that

in the pursuit of knowledge, the teachers and students engage in critical dialogue and each learns from the other. The distinction between student and teacher is blurred. For educationists some semblance of authority is essential for the smooth working of the education system and sometime the teacher has to play the part of an authoritative figure. Through, dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges – teacher-student with student-teacher (Freire, p-80). These views of Freire spelled out in the 1960's and 1970's still continue to be utopian and idealist to us today.

Dialogue and Critical Consciousness

Freire considers dialogue as an essential component of critical pedagogy. Critical consciousness is the ability to perceive the social, political and economic circumstances that surround us. For Freire unless the oppressive people of the third world are aware of the repressive and unjust system they cannot liberate themselves. Critical awareness can only be achieved by problem-posing and liberating education. People who have not achieved critical consciousness either do not perceive this injustice, or else regard it as something natural and inevitable, not man-made and alterable (p-320). The oppressor people of the third world have to take the mantle of liberating themselves from the oppressor. The oppressor by oppressing the marginalized and downtrodden dehumanizes them. The oppressed have to realize that in turn they don't become the oppressors.

Freire's work should be viewed in an historical context. The pedagogy of the oppressed was published in 1968 when Vietnam war was at its peak and the students protests had shaken the Western world. Most of the third world had become free from the clutches of colonialism but it was till dependent on the Western World. The third world stood in stark contrast to the West and the inequality between rich and poor was increasing. The dependency theory of Raul Prebisch stated that there is a relationship between developed and developing countries. The gap between them had been growing and third world merely exists as markets and supplier of raw materials for developed countries. Freire's work can be viewed as an attempt that the oppressed and exploited classes regain the status and humanity. For Freire one can not remain neutral under the oppressive circumstances. The oppressed majority must be taught to imagine a better way so that they can shape their future and thereby become more human. (Lyons).

Education Problems in Balochistan

The educational problems in Balochistan closely resemble those pointed out in Freire's work. The banking concept of education is a common aspect of our education system. The number of children who don't go to school or drop out of school is staggering. In Balochistan about two thirds of the population (68%) 10 years and over have never been to school. 77% of the population 10 years and over have not completed primary school or higher (Education Dept. 2011). The little segment of the children who go to school are taught in very difficult circumstances. The infrastructure in schools, the standards of curriculum and the pedagogical methods are troubling for scholars. Rote learning is a common phenomenon in our schools. The "teacher talks and the students listen meekly" and the students are presented with facts which the students memorizes indifferently. Emancipatory education for Freire is never a simple transmission of knowledge. Knowing is not accumulating of facts or information (Palmer, p-120).

Freire considers teachers as cultural workers who shape future ideas in society and work against prevailing prejudices. Freire regards teachers as liberators who broaden the students' mind and inculcate new thinking. If the teacher lacks the same level of critical consciousness and is not democratic in nature then he/she justifies the same rigid beliefs and conditions. A Freirean critical teacher is a problem-poser who asks though-provoking questions and who encourage students to ask their own questions (Leonrad, McLaren, p-25). We find teachers who lack the necessary learning to motivate students and who follow the same old rigid methods. Freire insists that questions like 'what?', 'why?', 'to what end?', 'for whom?' are critical to nay education activity (Palmer, p-129).

Conclusion

The three main ingredients of any formal education system are :
(i) Pedagogy (ii) Curriculum (iii) Examinations. Our educational system is miserably deficient in all these areas which certainly need drastic revamping. Some of Freire's ideas could be, of course considered for introduction in our educational institutions. But the stumbling block is the sterile and indifferent attitude of our political elite and bureaucracy. They are comfortable with the status-quo and any Freire like thought is anathema to them. The ills of learning by rote, student drop-out, incompetent and absentee teachers, and wide-spread cheating in exams is pervasive and continues as usual. Raising

questions and critical thinking is a far-cry even in our higher educational institutions.

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