Poonam Batra - I.1, 3, 4, 5. IV. 19, 20, 21, 22, 27

From Human Education in the 3rd Millennium

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(University of Delhi, India)

Policy

Introduction

• Current crisis in education compels us to unravel the limitations of neoliberal models of economic production, their impact on education policy and practice, and in impeding processes of social democracy.

• We need to examine how contemporary education incorporates interests of global capitalism and the free market, giving priority to the development of specific skills over human capacities to relate, cohere and be socially just.

• This may require us to look back at historical processes of decolonisation wherein diverse countries/societies have attempted to envisage an emancipatory education as part of freedom struggles.

• It would be meaningful to engage with how 'education' in terms of knowledge, its application and formal arrangements has contributed to ecological disasters; links communities have had with nature that have facilitated civilisations to survive in harmony with nature and how these are threatened by the 'economic growth/development' model.

• We must also examine how the trajectory of development is sustained through a 'modern system' of education that is being reformed by a neo-liberal agenda only to strengthen it further.

• Acknowledge that 'universal' solutions to the specific problems that societies across the world encounter cannot be the path forward; mainly because many of these problems may have occurred as a consequence of 'universal' ways of looking at educating diverse societies.

• There is need to bring back classical debates and reflections, emanating from philosophical theorisation on the relationship between education and the kind of society we want, in the context of different socio-cultural worlds, including colonial struggles and post-colonial engagements.

Pedagogy:

What might a human education look like?

• It is a popular given that existing systems of education reproduce divisiveness and hierarchies in society.

• Nevertheless, education has and must continue to resist attempts of the dominant to stifle democratic ways of thinking by disrupting power equations that sustain inequality and injustice.

• School curriculum has been examined as a space of intervention by both kind of forces – those who wish to maintain status and those who wish to create a more just society.

• Models of teacher education, on the other hand have been slow to change. Most remain disconnected from classroom and social realities, tending towards 'universal' theoretical knowledges and pragmatic, 'one size fits all' kind of solutions. This tends to 'disempower' teachers who are trained to think of 'knowledge' as a set of givens, learners as disconnected from socio-cultural milieus and teaching as an act of 'one way' communication.

• Teacher education curricula and pedagogic approaches rarely empower developing teachers to exercise agency in classrooms, schools and policy making.

• In privileging 'universal', 'de-contextualised' knowledge, school and teacher education curricula tend to undermine and make invisible other knowledge systems emanating from diverse societies, leaving virtually no space for cultivating human agency to change the conditions we live in.

• In this frame, equity ceases to be the aim of education. Instead education ends up strengthening systems and processes that sustain social injustice.

• It is important to engage with how 'science' as 'content' and 'method' has dominated formal education; and to re-examine the role that 'folk' theories, 'practical' knowledge, tacit or implicit knowledge, 'commonsensical' knowledge plays in developing 'good teachers'; and the marginalisation of 'knowledge' itself.

• Need to engage with debates on the politics of knowledge, its production and dissemination; which knowledge has premium/currency and why; and how the power of reason is being undermined in preference for popular identities and desires; distorting the idea of individual rights and social justice.

• Aesthetic knowledge and the creative arts, foregrounded by several philosophical traditions as central to developing 'sensibilities', need to become central to the process of reimagining education.

Emancipatory Education

• In order that education makes 'social equality and social justice' viable 'aims' of education, it is important to select and treat content and design processes of education that are egalitarian and emancipatory in nature.

• Pedagogical communication – the key to quality education – needs to follow basic principles of democracy. Young people need to understand diversity and appreciate difference rather than hierarchise difference.

• While a lot can be achieved via appropriate selection of curriculum content and its treatment, pedagogic communication can ensure that learners engage with social diversity and multiple perspectives, and understand their own and others positions in society.

• Education needs to become the means to interrogate domination and exploitation in societies; and a means to develop inner resilience and a sense of social justice.

• This becomes possible when the educational process is designed as dialogue - between teacher and students and among students - helping students to think and reflect from several perspectives as they engage.

• Breaking hierarchies helps students develop a sense of discerning judgement rather than become judgemental; and develop a sense of empathic inquiry and critical thinking.

Role of Culture in Education

• Colonisers have typically viewed 'culture' as an impediment to educate, to modernise, and to develop scientific thinking and universal knowledge.

• For education to become humane, it is important to view culture as a means of meaning-making and making knowledge socially and politically relevant. While culture contextualises formal knowledge and is therefore crucial to cultivating capacities for critical thinking and problem-solving, it must also become the subject of interrogation and inquiry.

• It would be critical to examine how 'local knowledges' (in diverse cultures) that are prejudiced can be projected as 'cultural' to become major frameworks of 'human values' based on 'religion', 'social norms and behaviour' that are violative of universal human rights.

• Need to foreground the social sciences as their undermining in a neo-liberal education has shrunk the possibility of studying how neoliberal policies and the free market impact societies, creating alienation among the youth.

Self-reflection and Self-development

• Experience as education in the Deweyan sense has been discarded as a guiding principle in organising education. This has taken away the need to reflect on one's actions and thought as necessary to develop finer capacities such as sensibilities, the ability to discern and to understand the inadequacy of language as a tool of communication.

• A humane education would focus on developing capacities to relate and communicate with each other; to empathise; agree to disagree; accept difference; develop the ability to listen, observe and act rather than react; reflect on oneself and learn to 'witness' one's thought and action.

Education and Values

• Developing an ethical sense and sensibilities need to be the focus rather than developing morality. It may be more meaningful to engage with universal human values in the context of progressive Constitutions of different countries that focus of equality, liberty, justice and fraternity.

• We need to bring into focus the 'content' of education as well; especially ideological debates and the intensification of patriarchy, protectionism, white/class/caste/religious supremacy that challenges the world today and how these are perpetuated through school and higher education curriculum and through a concerted

focus on altering popular consciousness about history of specific regions.

In Conclusion

• The project of humane education is a challenge of content as well as pedagogic approaches as these are intertwined in an educational dialogue.

• 'Dialogue as education' prompts young people to think critically, question themselves and what is around them with the aim to develop a sense of agency that can not only better their lives but the lives of others as well.

• True education is as much about liberating others as oneself, from material shackles and the fetters within.

SUPPLEMENT

Policy

Education systems across the contemporary world compel us to reflect upon and rethink education, its aims, processes and methods. It is especially important to examine how uniformization of education systems has happened over the years in different parts of the world.

For instance, how a 'global epistemic community' has influenced education policy in different countries, leading to policy 'borrowing' via processes of 'internationalisation'?

And how these have pushed back agendas specific to diverse societies of diverse nations?

This compels us to unravel the limitations of neoliberal models of economic production, their impact on education policy and practice, and in impeding processes of social democracy.

There is need to examine tendencies of contemporary education to incorporate interests of global capitalism and the free market, giving priority to the development of specific skills over human capacities to relate, cohere and be just; and the need to view education as a critical site for developing a democratic social order. This may require us to look back at historical processes of decolonisation wherein societies attempted to envisage an emancipatory education as part of freedom struggles. Through specific country examples it could be meaningful to engage with the intimate links between policy, societal needs and educational practice; and whether these links have enabled positive development of societies.

Other critical questions relate to how the natural environment and habitats of millions of species other than human are under grave threat and how education could play a significant role in reversing this trend. Here again, it would be important to examine how 'education' in terms of knowledge, its application and formal arrangements has in the first place contributed to the natural disasters that human society witnesses. Problematising the crucial role of education thus would be critical to envisioning a new role that education must play.

The need to look at cultural roots of an 'informal education' – such as links communities have had with nature that has facilitated civilisations to survive in harmony with nature and how these are threatened by the 'economic growth/development' model. It is equally important to understand how the trajectory of

development is sustained through a 'modern system' of education that is being reformed by a neo-liberal agenda only to strengthen it further.

If education is indeed a shared and global responsibility, it must first acknowledge the need to address specific needs of diverse societies.

'Universal' solutions to the specific problems that societies across the world encounter cannot be the path forward; mainly because many of these problems may have occurred as a consequence of 'universal' ways of looking at educating diverse societies.

This engagement compels us to bring back classical debates and reflections, emanating from philosophical theorisation on the relationship between education and the kind of society we want.

Scholarship across the world is likely to provide diverse examples that could help us discuss the relationship between education and society in the context of different socio-cultural worlds, including colonial struggles and post-colonial engagements.

Pedagogy: What might a human education look like?

There have been continuing debates on how existing systems of education reproduce divisiveness and hierarchies in society and how education must resist attempts to impose the dominant, stifle democratic ways of thinking by disrupting power equations that sustain inequality and injustice. School curriculum has been examined as a space of intervention by both kind of forces – those who wish to maintain status and those who wish to create a more just society. Models of teacher education, on the other hand have been slow to change. Most tend to remain disconnected from classroom and social realities, tending towards 'universal' theoretical knowledges and pragmatic, 'one size fits all' kind of solutions. This tends to 'disempower' teachers who are trained to think of 'knowledge' as a set of givens, learners as disconnected from their socio-cultural milieu and teaching as an act of 'one way' communication. Teacher education curricula and pedagogic approaches rarely empower developing teachers to exercise agency in classrooms, schools and policy making.

In privileging 'universal', 'de-contextualised' knowledge, school and teacher education curricula tend to undermine and make invisible other knowledge systems emanating from diverse societies. The pedagogical influence of the 'geo-politics of knowledge' leads to an education that 'disempowers', leaving virtually no space for cultivating human agency to change the conditions we live in. In this frame, equity ceases to be the aim of education. Instead education ends up strengthening systems and processes that sustain social injustice.

In discussing different kind of knowledges it is important to engage with how 'science' as 'content' and 'method' has dominated formal education. At the same time, the role 'folk' theories play or what is referred to as 'practical' knowledge, tacit or implicit knowledge, 'commonsensical' knowledge as the key to develop 'good teachers' needs re-examining. Apart from this, aesthetic knowledge and the creative arts, foregrounded by several philosophical traditions as central to developing 'sensibilities', need to become central to the process of reimagining education.

In the contemporary context where neoliberal agendas focus only of developing skills and competencies, 'knowledge' itself is getting marginalized and only specific kind of knowledges are projected as legitimate for a 21st century world, rendering human agency irrelevant. We may like to look at the debates on the politics of knowledge, its production and dissemination; which knowledge has premium/currency and why; and how the power of reason is being undermined in preference for popular identities and desires; distorting the idea of individual rights and social justice.

Emancipatory Education

In order that education makes 'social equality and social justice' viable 'aims' of education (acknowledging that education alone cannot achieve this), it is important to select and treat content and design processes of education that are egalitarian and emancipatory in nature. Pedagogical communication – the key to quality education – needs to follow basic principles of democracy. This can be achieved by first engaging with 'difference' as in diversity. Teaching and studying an understanding of and coping with 'alterity' - a comprehensive relationship with the other; to teach to respect all and listen to the 'other'. Alterity is particularly important in enabling young people to understand diversity and appreciate difference rather than hierarchise difference. While a lot can be achieved via appropriate selection of curriculum content and its treatment, pedagogic communication can ensure that learners engage with social diversity and multiple perspectives, and understand their own and others position in society. Education needs to become the means to interrogate domination and exploitation in societies; and a means to develop inner resilience and a sense of social justice. This becomes possible when the educational process is designed as dialogue - between teacher and students and among students - helping students to think and reflect from several perspectives as they engage. Breaking the hierarchy between the teacher and taught helps students develop a sense of discerning judgement rather than become judgemental; and develop a sense of empathic inquiry and critical thinking.

Role of Culture in Education

Colonisers have typically viewed 'culture' as an impediment to educate, to modernise, and to develop scientific thinking and universal knowledge. As a consequence, education remained disconnected from people's lives and social milieu even in post-colonial societies, leading to alienation from formal knowledge. For education to become humane, it is important to view culture as a means of meaning-making and making knowledge socially and politically relevant. While culture contextualises formal knowledge and is therefore crucial to cultivating capacities for critical thinking and problem-solving, it must also become the subject of interrogation and inquiry. For instance, it would be critical to examine how 'local knowledges' that are prejudiced can be projected as 'cultural' to become major frameworks of 'human values' based on 'religion', 'social norms and behaviour' that is violative of universal human rights. Diverse cultures may also offer diverse means of education and pedagogical approaches other than those associated with formal education: apprenticeship, communities of practice, situated cognition.

The neo-liberal agenda is not only dictating curriculum content that serves the free market in a globalised economy, it dictates what happens inside the classroom as well. For instance, the emphasis on STEM propagated by international assessments have filled up the entire space of school curricula and pedagogic communication. School time tables are reluctant to allot time to the social sciences as these are not critical to competing in international assessment tests. In teacher education too, sociology and philosophy are no longer theoretical markers for developing sound teachers. The undermining of social sciences is also taking away the possibility of studying how neoliberal policies and the free market impact societies, creating alienation among the youth. Self-reflection and self-development The critical link between experience and education; experience as education in the Deweyan sense has been discarded as a guiding principle in organising education. This has taken away the need to reflect on one's actions and thought as necessary to develop finer capacities such as sensibilities, the ability to discern and to understand the inadequacy of language as a tool of communication. A humane education would focus on developing capacities to relate and communicate with each other; to empathise; agree to disagree; be tolerant of difference; develop the ability to listen, observe and act rather than react; reflect on oneself and learn to 'witness' one's thought and action.

Education and Values

Developing an ethical sense and sensibilities need to be the focus rather than developing morality. Moral education over the years has led to privileging some communities or religions leading to competitiveness rather than social cohesiveness. It may be more meaningful to engage with universal human values in the context of progressive Constitutions of different countries that focus of equality, liberty, justice and fraternity. We need to bring into focus the 'content' of education as well; especially ideological debates and the intensification of patriarchy, protectionism, white supremacy that challenges the world today and how these are perpetuated through school and higher education curriculum and through a concerted focus on altering popular consciousness about history of specific regions.

The project of humane education is thus a challenge of content as well as pedagogic approaches as these are intertwined in an educational dialogue. 'Dialogue as education' prompts young people to think critically, question themselves and what is around them with the aim to develop a sense of agency that can not only better their lives but the lives of others as well. True education is as much about liberating others as oneself, from material shackles and the fetters within.

This page was last modified on 30 June 2019, at 23:14.