

## Education as an Instrument for Liberation

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I ask you to spend the next few minutes looking, with me, at the subject 'Education as an instrument of liberation'. For some people listening to an address on that subject may sound a waste of time. Is it not true that it is some of the educated people in this country who provide cheap labour? Is it not true that in many townships it is the uneducated who own what appear to be successful businesses? Is it not also true that it is the educated who form the black middle class and then go on to strive to save and preserve what they have? Is it not the educated who are 'reasonable' because they understand the ways of the white man?

To find an adequate answer to these questions would take a great deal of research and a long dissertation. Perhaps for our purpose we need to attempt to verbalise some traditional purposes of education. In our society, i.e. South Africa, we are educated so that we can fit into slots created by society. We get a good education in order to be useful and productive members of society. We go to school in order to avoid being misfits in the world. Then such a purpose is to make a good living, earn a good salary, build some security for ourselves and our children. Thus in any given society it is often the educated who own the more expensive houses with high walls and big dogs, a Mercedes for the madam and a Volkswagen beetle for the man. All this, I want to suggest, stems from a misunderstanding of education, and the kind of education that the ruler wants the ruled to have.

Paulo Freire, a native of Brazil, is the man who through his work with adult illiterates in north-east Brazil brought into existence the word conscientisation. He makes the point that education cannot be neutral. He says, 'It means that no matter if we are conscious or not as educators, our praxis is either for the

liberation of men, their humanisation, or for their domestication - their domination. Liberation is the opposite of domestication for our purposes. This then means that we can never employ the same methods for liberation as we use for domestication. Education for domestication means the alienation of man. It is then false to say that the end justifies the means because there is always the pre-existence of the end in the means. The methods that lead to domestication can never achieve lasting freedom. This then means those who teach for liberation must reject in their entirety the present methods used in our education. The teacher must re-examine his role and the role of the student and be seen differently. The present teacher-student relationship must be changed.

#### The teacher-student relationship

In this relationship the teacher is the narrating subject and the students are the patient listening objects. In this relationship the students come with empty heads to be filled with the knowledge the teacher has. If you can picture an empty pail being filled with milk, this gives a picture of what happens in education for domestication. The task of the student is to memorise the contents of the narration. The fact that these contents are not within the existential experience of the student is neither here nor there. Narration turns them into 'containers', into receptacles to be filled by the teacher. The more completely he fills the empty heads, the better teacher he is. The more meekly the empty heads permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.

The teacher is the one who is knowledgeable and therefore is the opposite of his ignorant students. He justifies his role through the absolute ignorance of the students, and the students accept him because he has the knowledge. They never see themselves as educating the teacher, and the teacher never sees himself as a student. The teacher deposits knowledge into the mind of the student, thus projecting ignorance upon the student. This, of course, is the favourite tactic of the oppressor. This is the banking concept of education.

In education for liberation we need to see that both the teacher and the student are simultaneously teachers and students. The banking concept of education, Freire

maintains, highlights the contradictions in the teacher-student relationship. These also reflect oppressive society.

1 / The teacher tells, the student accepts.

2 / The teacher is the one who knows everything, the students are absolutely ignorant.

3 / He cogitates and the object of his cogitation is the students.

4 / The teacher lectures, and the students are all ears.

5 / The teacher exercises discipline, and the students are there to accept it.

6 / The enforced choice is the teacher's, and the students do as they are told.

7 / The teacher is the actor, and the students see themselves acting through what the teacher does.

8 / The teacher, without consulting the students, chooses what is to be taught and the students have to try and fit themselves to the programme.

9 / In the learning situation the teacher is the subject of the process, and the students are no more than objects.

10 / The teacher restricts the freedom of the students through confusing the authority of knowledge with his professional authority.

The black teacher needs to ask himself, 'Why am I a teacher, anyway?' If he begins to deal with that question seriously he will need to ask, 'Who am I?' In their book, *Teaching As A Subversive Activity*, Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner list these honest answers to the first question:

I can control people.

I can tyrannise people.

I have captive audiences.

I have my summers off.

I love seventeenth-century non-dramatic Elizabethan literature.

I don't know.

The pay is good, considering the amount of work I actually do.

Education for liberation must first of all resolve the teacher-student problem. The teacher who seeks to liberate his students helps them learn how to learn. Primarily it is learning how to deal with problems. He engages in a problem-posing education. He builds the

students' confidence in tackling problems. Not problems for which there are already cut and dried answers. He shapes the thinking of the students but he is so open that his thinking can be shaped by other students. I want to suggest that what we lack in this country are people who can think. Our schools, colleges and universities churn out people who can only remember. Do you or can you remember how at school your teacher said, 'Now think Mohamood,' and you knew what she meant was, 'Try and remember what I told you'.

This problem-posing concept of education must be the aim of every educator of any oppressed people. This is one way to reject our desire to be like those who are determined to keep us down. Even as I speak I begin to have doubts of our seriousness about being fuller human beings when we are going to put people through a system of education which equips them to fit into a machine; when we give them an opportunity to go through an educational system that changes 'to be' into 'to be like', and 'to be like' is 'to be like the oppressor'. Surely our aim or purpose in education is not to become oppressors ourselves. We cannot seek full humanness in order to dehumanise. In our dehumanisation we could say that we have deteriorated with the dehumaniser but the tragedy is that we are dehumanised because of the inhumanity of man to man.

Problem-posing education must help us deal with change. Any education that only changes our consciousness and has that as its sole purpose is enslaving education. We are living through a change revolution. You may not believe it but it is true, the gospel we are supposed to preach is one of change. I cannot be a minister of religion and Christianity in particular if I fear change. Change has as its aim to make man a fuller being, to enable man to fulfil an aim and purpose in life that makes life meaningful. Change must work towards greater freedom. Therefore education must aim at change as man struggles to find reality and what the truth is.

As has already been pointed out our education helps us to adapt to a world designed and created by others. If the others are the oppressors then the oppressed can never hope to get out of their oppression through that education. They will be better equipped to serve the oppressor. They will understand their role a little

better. They will accept their higher status in an oppressed community. Thus the teacher compares his salary with that of a street sweeper but never with that of a teacher in the privileged community.

We must equip our students for change. This you may find interesting. Postman and Weingartner use the image of a clock.

'Imagine a clock face with sixty minutes on it. Let the clock stand for the time men have had access to writing systems. Our clock would thus represent something like three thousand years, and each minute on our clock fifty years. On this scale, there were no significant media changes until about nine minutes ago. At that time, the printing press came into use in Western culture. About three minutes ago, the telegraph, photograph, and locomotive arrived. Two minutes ago: the telephone, rotary press, motion pictures, automobile, aeroplane and radio. One minute ago the talking picture. Television has appeared in the last ten seconds, the computer in the last five, and communications satellites in the last second. The laser beam - perhaps the most potent medium of communication of all - appeared only a fraction of a second ago....'

Problem-posing education leads us to question what is being transmitted to us. Many a teacher is in the transmission business. His task in educating others is passing on what has been handed down to him. It does not matter whether what he passes on is outdated or not. People have observed that 'if you are over twenty-five years of age, the mathematics you were taught at school is "old"; the grammar you were taught is obsolete and in disrepute; the biology, completely out of date; and the history, open to serious question. The best that can be said of you, assuming that you remember most of what you were told and read, is that you are a walking encyclopaedia of outdated information'.

Our education is so conducted that we are trained to accept authority without ever questioning it. To make the grade the student must figure out what is in the mind of the teacher when a question is asked. The authority must be satisfied. This is so true even in life outside school. In school, have you ever seen a

student taking notes from what another student says? Even in public meetings what matters is what the guest speaker says. The student in the class, the person from the audience who makes a contribution does not have the authority so what he says is of no consequence. This is just what the oppressor wants. It matters a great deal who is invited to address people, especially people who have been through our system of education. You cannot speak of liberation and invite any speaker from the privileged community. Rather put up with inferior, shallow freedom than with sophisticated oppression.

Education that seeks to liberate people is one that must produce good learners. These are people who can never be satisfied with what they are just told. These are people who enjoy struggling with problems. When they are beaten they never give up but tackle the following one with new zest, vigour and determination. Good learners are the ones who are never quick to give an answer. They pause until they have gathered enough information to work through the problem. They value their freedom and seek to free others.

In this country, truly educated men will be those who will day in and day out struggle with the problems we face as black people. The service that doctors give patients will not be confused with eradicating disease. The services by undertakers will not be confused with preventing unnecessary death. The services lawyers give their clients will not be confused with the struggle for just laws. Education must seek to affirm the being of people, black people in particular. Our degree diplomas and certificates will mean nothing until they spell freedom from ignorance, fear, dehumanisation and oppression. Our education will be effective when we transcend our state of oppression and work for liberation. Education will be liberation when we learn to be for others, when we are led out of ourselves, free to free others, black and white.