

Exploring Potentialities in a Child

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is locating schools and prevalent pedagogic practices in the context of the debate on Democracy and Citizenship. The paper tries to explore the current scenario of the schools which lacks dialogue in classrooms which in turn makes the students uniform followers of an institution which provides no space for imagination and creativity. It explores the classroom setting taking into consideration variables like the teacher, learning environment, textbooks and the student himself. This article talks about the evaluation system and examination as a tool to create hierarchy and to perpetuate fear in the students making learning a burden. Finally it talks about education as a journey of endless possibilities.

Education is the progressive discovery of our ignorance

– Anonymous

Educationists and Philosophers have been perpetually reflecting on the purpose of education. It is generally agreed that the purpose of education is not just to acquire skill, possess a baggage of information and knowledge and earn one's livelihood. Rather it is argued that the purpose is to cultivate the fundamental faculties of learning-

how to observe, how to explore and experience the connectedness among different phenomenon around us.

Schools and pedagogic discourses have been subjected to varying analysis of different perspectives. Some have analysed schools as an agent of social change leading to modernity and making social mobility possible (Pathak 2002:22).

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Others like Green has argued that "schools exist not to create a democratic society or a civil ideal, but for 'certifying, sorting and selecting personnel'" (Green 1971:133). For classical sociologists like Durkheim education serves two functions, firstly it prepares a child for a specific type of occupation and secondly it enables the child to internalise the core values of the society.

However, if schools are placed within the debate of democracy and citizenship locating schools and the pedagogic discourse would be highly contested and paradoxical because the process of the present pedagogy and the system of schooling is leading towards a situation that negates the participatory spirit of democracy. Prevailing pedagogic discourse can be situated within the 'representative' nature of democracy, which is not undesirable but limited in scope. It fails to transcend the duality of the rulers' vs. the ruled; and which reduces 'governed' into passive receivers of policies/decisions formulated by the political elite and select techno-economic experts. And democracy exists as mere formal democracy: voting, same-rights etc. Pedagogy focuses on transforming little minds into uniform, non-questioning and obedient followers of a particular system which curtails creativity and imagination.

Therefore, under the larger theoretical questions/propositions discussed above we are posing two critical questions. Firstly, we are

raising a question on the culture of schooling: the way it breeds uniformity, and negates reflexivity, uniqueness and criticality. Secondly about the status of teachers: as mere "professionals" they fail to create meaningful pedagogy. And, how these processes are leading to a situation that negates the participatory spirit of democracy. These questions come to a full circle when we try and tie these questions to Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic violence" by which he means "... a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precise misrecognition), recognition or even feeling" (Burawoy 2008:5). However the understanding of schools in the context of Democracy would be incomplete if we do not discuss components like classroom transactions, role of the teacher and other variables in depth.

In the article I will be discussing about the child (student) who is central in relation to schooling and learning. My emphasis will be on the children up to the elementary level. While talking about schools evaluation and assessment are essential components to understand and 'quantify' the 'growth' of a child. However, in my view this idea of evaluation is highly problematic as it breeds inequality and hierarchy between children and also curtails or even suppresses the individuality and uniqueness of

each child. Their own understanding or their ability to comprehend the reality is ruthlessly crushed under the burden of examination, but does any examination have the power to determine the qualitative growth of a child which is equally important for the holistic growth of the child. This concern has been resonated in Pathak's book (2002) *"Social Implications of Schooling: Knowledge, Pedagogy and Consciousness"* where he states,

To begin with, examinations make objectification (of students) possible, because the 'neutrality' of examinations – their 'coldness' their 'impartiality' does not see a student as an autonomous person with his/her specific needs, tastes and demands. In the ultimate analysis, grades, percentage of marks define them. Their qualitative experiences, biographies, and their unique ways of knowing/comprehending, are all forgotten. What is recognised is their position in the hierarchy. This objectification is also an effective way of controlling them; of telling them that they are destined to be hierarchised, graded quantified.

Even in the *National Curriculum Framework* (2005) there were mentions about reforms in the examination system but did the reforms really helped? At this juncture the process of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation gains limelight because it claims to evaluate every aspect of the child. This new evaluation came to the forefront

with the belief that this process of assessment would help reduce the stress making learning joyous and fun-filled. I agree, that this mode of evaluation as a systematic reform did make a difference but the difference is not too widespread and happening only in small pockets.

It is now essential that we talk about the teacher. I read somewhere that 'the biggest illusion that a teacher have is he/she can teach, for a teacher can never teach but facilitate'. This phrase makes complete sense to me as a spectator of the contemporary scenario where which is fiercely driven by market oriented forces and schools are no exceptions. Every school are running a cut throat competition to met the target of result which takes a toll on the very imagination and creativity of children to do something innovative or something that interests them. This very meeting the target of exemplary result is just breeding fear-fear of losing, failing and fear of not being able to fit oneself in the herd of "Bright students". We forget or does not even consider the fact that classroom transaction are not about teacher questioning and pupil answering, the other way round could also be a viable tool to make the teaching-learning experience innovative and meaningful. As far as learning is considered it is a multi-dimensional process and cannot be limited in classroom setups and constrained within the prescribed textbooks, rather the task of the

teacher should be to inculcate the habit of critical thinking in students enabling them to look beyond the mundane nature of classroom and textbooks because they are not the only source to "educate" them for their holistic development.

Having said that we will also have to understand the power nexus that is prevalent (at times implicit and at times explicit) in a classroom situation. Teacher is having the power over the students by the virtue of being the teacher. However in order to create a more democratic and conducive learning environment this power discourse has to end because in the process of teaching the teacher too learns from the students through their questions and queries. Therefore, the teacher at the first place has to shed off the illusion that he/she has complete mastery of Knowledge, in doing so he/she will automatically create a conducive learning space for newer perspectives and possibilities eventually making way for a new knowledge base upholding and glorifying the participatory spirit of democracy where everyone has the right to voice their opinions and thoughts without any fear of judgement and restrictions.

But how can this realisation come about in teachers? This realisation is only possible through reflection (in action and on action). The teacher has to make himself/herself understand that it is alright to not know everything also he/she must feel empowered and comfortable

enough to say "*I don't know*" in a class for that will help the students eventually to realise that failing is not a taboo and it is completely fine to fail. In the larger context this sort of an attitude will prove effective in making the children learn to satisfy his/her curiosity rather than rote learning meant to pass examinations. It will make the students shift from being passive consumers of information to active participants in classrooms.

Freire claims that every individual no matter how deeply conditioned and accustomed in the 'culture of silence' is capable of exploring and realising his own world in a dialogic encounter with others. He also argues that when such an 'oppressed' individual is equipped with the adequate tools for such an encounter he can gradually perceive his personal and social reality as well as contradictions in it and become conscious of his own perceptions of that reality and deal critically with it it is at this juncture the role of a teacher as a potent facilitator gains momentum for only a teacher has the capability and power to make the student equipped enough to look beyond the obvious to challenge and to question. In his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* he gave paradigm importance to dialogue, and saw it as most important way of communication-a medium through which the hierarchical gap between the teacher and the student could be broken and a more reciprocal bond could be formed. And if this sort of an ideal situation arises social mobility

would indeed be possible in the realm of reality because the student themselves will question and even challenge the existing social order, which breeds hierarchy and inequality heralding a new dawn at the face of the current society where democracy has been reduced to a lofty ideal as enshrined in the constitution.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, keeping in mind all the above discussed arguments and propositions it would be safe enough to say that education is a life-long process and cannot be contained or constrained within a particular

classroom or a particular textbook. And if the student learns how to look beyond textbooks learning would be enriching and more meaningful. If the teacher becomes sensitive enough they can become potent tools of change in the society and also if the students are given the space and motivation to pursue their interests they can do wonders which would give rise to boundless possibilities, but the current examination system hold them back in doing so because the system perpetuate fear in the tender hearts of the student who are part of the mad rat race. After all Education is an endless journey of possibilities.

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