

# Pedagogy of the oppressed by freire, greene and kliwer essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Paulo Friere's article titled 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' is provocative yet truthful in its observations. Contrary to comforting conventional views on mainstream education systems, Friere presents a new perspective on the subject. He views the teacher-pupil equations in these systems as rather oppressive, as it reinforces misconceptions about knowledge and expertise. More controversially, Friere demystifies the notion of the 'omniscient' teacher and his/her authority over the 'ignorant' pupil. In this 'banking concept of education' students are seen as "adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world." (Friere, 1997, p. 54) Under this system not only is there a supposed knowledge asymmetry between the teacher and the pupil, but the former also holds professional authority that is not always grounded on merit. Moreover, this banking education minimizes or annuls the students' creative energies so as to serve the interests of the oppressors, whose primary motive is not progress or critical inquiry. To the contrary, under the humanitarian veil of the educators lies their intention to perpetuate the status quo.

Maxine Greene's article titled Teaching for Social Justice is similar in tenor to that of Paulo Freire's. The history of human societies is full of instances of the privileged few (the oppressors) dominating the majority rest through explicit and implicit means. Where brute force proved unviable, sophisticated indoctrination through education ensured domination. Further, "the privileged few were the ones with the opportunities to map and dominate the linguistic universe. The imbalance, the undeserved advantages in that

domain as well as in the socioeconomic and political worlds is evidences of the most glaring social injustice.” (Greene, 1988 p. 29) It is in this context that an educational system be devised, whose end is to ensure that each citizen is at the least entitled to develop and build his/her “ intellectual, social, emotional, and expressive capacities”. (Greene, 1988, p. 29)

Consistent with the arguments made by Paulo Freire, Marine Greene too advocates a new way of looking at our educational institutions and their underlying motives. Contrary to what the system produces, she espouses Teaching for Social Justice. Here, teaching is to project

“ what we believe ought to be - not merely where moral frameworks are concerned, but in material arrangements for people in all spheres of society. Moreover, teaching for social justice is teaching for the sake of arousing the kinds of vivid, reflective, experiential responses that might move students to come together in serious efforts to understand what social justice actually means and what it might demand.” (Greene, 1988, p. 30)

Kliwer’s article focusing on the special needs of Down syndrome children is also of a similar vein to the other two articles. The author feels that current understanding of this health condition and schooling possibilities for children afflicted with it is quite limited. (Kliwer, 1988) And hence educators should be more open and inclusive of children of different capabilities as they draw up their curricula. In essence, there is much convergence in the content and thrust of the three articles as they express their concern about mainstream education today.

After having read these three articles and based on my own educational experience in childhood, I am mostly in agreement with the views expressed by Freire, Greene and Kliever. Formal education is something most children in our country have the privilege of attending. To its credit, the education system in the United States has extended literacy and math skills to several generations of students. As a result, the country overall has become more educated. The percentage of young adults passing high-school has increased steadily; and so has the number of graduates, post-graduates and doctoral students. Yet, when we look at what kind of products children turn out to be at the end of this process, the results are not satisfactory. When we look at how far formal education serves to 'enlighten' young minds, the answer is disappointing. When we look at young adults' ability to make informed choices about what they consume or their ability to act as responsible citizens of a democratic country, etc., we find plenty of inadequacies. These aspects of the education system make me uneasy. As opposed to imparting necessary cognitive tools for young people to think for themselves and act as they see merit, the present system indoctrinates them to become obedient automatons in the corporate world. This is reflected in the fact that student intake in disciplines under Humanities (including that of Education/Instructional Design courses) has decreased over the years and technical/vocational courses have become preferred choices due to lucrative career paths they offer.

In order to compensate for the deficiencies in the education system pointed to by the authors, a lot of hard work from earnest educators is necessary. It is perhaps a reflection of my deep compassion for children that I have

chosen to be an educator. Moreover, I have thoroughly enjoyed teaching young kids, especially of elementary school level. With modern education technology much advanced than what it was a few decades ago, it would be an exciting time to be a teacher. For example, today there are overhead projectors, personal computer terminals, on-line library databases with extensive catalogs, sophisticated research methodologies, etc that are available to the instructor. Using all these, I intend to create for my students a wonderful learning experience in the classroom and beyond. More importantly, though, I would try to incorporate some of the changes recommended by the three authors in discussion. An open approach to education, where the emphasis is on critical and original thinking as opposed to grades, is a worthy objective. I would also try to keep in mind Kliever's suggestions for an inclusive classroom environment, where special needs children could cohabit in harmony with others.

Based on what I learnt from the three authors, I would also like to contribute toward positive changes to our education system. At present, as research conducted on SAT score data reveal, there is a definite race-bias in many of these standardized tests. There is also the problem faced by Hispanic-American kids, whose mother tongue is Spanish. The way in which some schools get funded easily while others struggle to garner government support is also problematic. This is illustrated by the obvious failure areas of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in the last few years. Despite so much social progress over the centuries, socio-economic background and race/ethnicity are significant determinants of academic success. And I am interested in working on viable solutions for these problems.

And finally, to bring my personal perspectives to my role as an inclusive educator, I would also promote John Dewey's philosophy of education. As per this school of thought, education is best acquired when creativity is given a free reign and constructive co-operation is encouraged among students. In the current education system, co-operation is replaced by competition for high-grades, which goes against the spirit of social cohesion and unity and turns children upon each other. Implementing Dewey-ite system of education would be my cherished goal, and I would put in all efforts necessary toward achieving it.

### **References:**

Freire, P. (1955). Chapter 2. IN Pedagogy of the oppressed. (pp. 52-67). (M. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1970)

Greene, M. (1988). Introduction: Teaching for social justice. In W. Ayers, J. A. Hunt & TKliewer, C. (1988). Schooling children with Down Syndrome: Toward an understanding of possibility. New York: Teachers College Press.