

Critical Pedagogy in the New Normal

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ABSTRACT

Critical pedagogy is an educational approach that challenges students to develop the ability to recognize and criticize dominating theories and evaluate them in their social context. Teachers press students to recognize oppression and try to remedy oppression in their culture. Despite the lack of in-person interaction between the teacher and the students, the effort to use innovative teaching techniques like critical pedagogy should continue.

Keywords: Global education, Critical Pedagogy, Online Learning, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus pandemic is a challenge to educators, policy makers, and ordinary people. In facing the threat from COVID-19, school systems and global institutions need “to address the essential matter of each human being and how they are interacting with, and affected by, a much wider set of biological and technical conditions.”¹ Educators must grapple with the societal issues that come with the intent of ensuring the safety of the public. To some, “these are actually as important as the biological concerns of people.”²

The current global crisis shows that “scientifically, socially, and politically the economy and technosphere are not just related, they are integral to a comprehensive response to major challenges.”³ In developing these responses, scientists, government leaders, and policy makers need to consider the vulnerabilities of people, especially those in “thrown away” groups.⁴ Jerome Ravetz explains that “microscopic viral predators cull our populations, as ever, but with a selection that is not natural but social and political.”⁵ Educators must address

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the underlying vulnerabilities and evaluate the virus as a threat to academic experiences and access to a fair education.

ANALYSIS

I. Critical Pedagogy

By definition, the critical approach to teaching is about the problem-posing method of education developed by Paulo Freire. In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he proposed a paradigm shift away from the banking method of learning wherein teachers deposit knowledge into the minds of students. Critical pedagogy is an educational approach that challenges students to develop the ability to recognize and criticize dominating theories and evaluate them in their social context. Teachers press students to recognize oppression and try to remedy oppression in their culture.⁶ Despite the lack of in-person interaction between the teacher and the students, the effort to use innovative teaching techniques like critical pedagogy should continue.

Online learning is not just about the use of technology, although the internet is crucial in the delivery of content. Since human beings are creators of value, they determine the meaning and purpose of technology. In this way, the set of values people have will influence online learning. Teachers cannot be more concerned about outcomes than about the process itself. The process is crucial since the ability of the student to think critically is developed in the exchange between the student and the teacher. The teacher cannot simply dump loads of information (deposit knowledge) but must pose problems to test the analytical and critical skills of students.⁷

Education is about how people humanize the world. Policy makers miss the point when they focus on the delivery but do not pay attention to the substantive aspect of learning, which is human empowerment. Education is meant to expand the freedom of people. Education should be seen as an integrative activity. Learning is a formative process that aims to develop the human person. Without the face-to-face encounter between teacher and students, the challenge is finding ways to make learning an effective means to mold the values of young people.

II. Online Critical Pedagogy & the Role of Technology

Physical distance appears to be an impediment in realizing the ideals of learning. The lack of contact between the teacher and the students may prevent a more meaningful interaction since online instruction is impersonal. It can be argued that there is no alternative to some classroom activities, especially laboratory experiments in science courses. The total classroom environment naturally influences the behavior of students when it comes to academic work: the look in the eyes of the professor, the caring ways of a teacher, or the pressure while taking exams contribute to an experience that only a classroom setting can provide. If implemented properly, technology can facilitate the personal relationships between teachers and students while providing meaningful experiences.

With the current need for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, gadgets are indispensable. Some would even consider gadgets an extension of the human body. A mobile phone is not just any instrument; it has evolved into a novel way of being in the world. Our gadgets are a means of seeing how the outside world unfolds. Modern technological tools allow the interface of people in many fields of experience in a globalized environment. Computers and other digital devices extend the meaning and value of human

freedom. For example, a laptop provided to a poor child can redefine the meaning of and what the future might hold for that child. The device is crucial to the whole learning process. Modern tools are critical to self-discovery and greater freedom.

The values that people embrace will matter in the new normal. The internet has provided a new democratic space that empowers groups and individuals to express themselves and to understand the world.⁸ In an online class, students and teachers alike need to analyze big picture questions and layers of information. For example, the student in an ethics or philosophy class can reflect on the realities of life. With the proper guidance, online education should help define the meaning of moral commitment and human responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Before the pandemic, policy makers had been pursuing the goals of a globalized economy. They had been fashioning and promoting programs that cater to the interests of a consumer-driven world that has deprived the poor of opportunity. When the pandemic struck, globalization suddenly came to a halt and people realized the things that truly matter in life – family, love, and life itself. The new normal must now emphasize the role of education as a source of inner strength that can empower the person to live well reinforcing values based on a social consciousness.

Critical pedagogy is possible under the new normal. The distance between the teacher and student does not make the educational process less real and in the absence of a vaccine, online learning is the safest strategy. Governments cannot freeze an entire school year since education is the only way out from poverty for millions. The COVID-19 pandemic provides a reason to re-imagine teaching using technology to encourage all students to question systems of oppression or greed, as the persistent pursuit of the truth is what education is all about.

¹ Hartsell, Layne, Krabbe, Alexander, & Pastreich, Emmanuel. "Covid-19, Global Justice, and a New Biopolitics of the Anthropocene." *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2020), 3.

² Ravetz, Jerome. "Science for a Proper Recovery: Post-Normal, not New Normal." *Issues in Science and Technology* [Internet] July 15, 2020. <https://issues.org/post-normal-science-for-pandemic-recovery/>

³ Hartsell, et al. "Covid-19, Global Justice, and a New Biopolitics of the Anthropocene," 6.

⁴ Ravetz, "Science for a Proper Recovery: Post-Normal, not New Normal."

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (New York: Continuum Books, 1993).

⁷ Freire writes that in such a situation "instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat." See his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

⁸ Bakardjieva, Maria. *Internet Society*. (London: Sage Publications, 2005).