

The Pedagogy of Leadership and Educating a Global Workforce

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Abstract

No Child Left Behind illustrates policy that stifles pedagogy and the effective training of a global workforce. In an effort to enhance the educational outcomes of students, critical pedagogy and Gardner's Five Minds for the Future are presented as tools for the cultivation of a more innovative workforce. The pedagogical strategies and framework presented hold the potential of improving the academic output and global competitiveness of postsecondary graduates.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, Gardner's Five Minds for the Future, global workforce

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No Child Left Behind (NCLB) provides an interesting case to illustrate policy that negates global competitiveness. The standardized test driven nature of the accountability initiative centered upon three core assumptions. The first assumption rested in the belief that the state knows best in terms of what a child should master at various grade levels to be competitive in a global economy. Another assumption was that true learning can actually occur in such an environment. The policy also assumed that implementation equaled the playing field between the “haves” and “have nots.” In fact the name “No Child Left Behind” reflects this assumption.

The premise of the state or policy makers as experts in education counters goals of superior education, high achievement, and egalitarian educational outcomes. While some policy makers have backgrounds in teaching, the bulk hold limited understanding of pedagogy, educational research, and where U.S. children stand as compared to their international peers. This gap in knowledge between the policy maker, the researcher, and the practitioner stifles potential progress towards national educational excellence. Rather, the policy outcomes reflect the very inequity it claims to remedy. As a result of NCLB, struggling districts have been penalized for not meeting standards. Furthermore, teachers as well as the public, criticized the policy for promoting “teaching to the test.” Some educators question whether under such conditions true learning can occur.

Lipman (2004) holds that contemporary policy discourse “shifts responsibility for social inequity produced by the state onto parents, students, schools, communities, and teachers” (pp. 171-172). This shift has led to the de-professionalization of teachers, continued inequity amongst schools and increased underachievement of students, particularly the poor and racial minorities. Rather than being prepared for competitive careers, many minority and working class children are being prepared for service and retail employment through “vocational education, restricted (basic skills) curricula, and intensified regimentation of instruction and/or control of students” (p. 49). Lipman further explains:

The policy regime that I have described is producing stratified knowledge, skills, dispositions, and identities for a deeply stratified society. Under the rubric of standards, the policies impose standardization and enforce language and cultural assimilation to mold the children of the increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse workforce into a most malleable and governable source of future labor. This is a system that treats people as a means to an end. The “economizing of education” and the discourse of accounting reduce people to potential sources of capital accumulation, manipulators of knowledge for global economic expansion, or providers of the services and accessories of leisure and pleasure of the rich. Students are reduced to test scores, future slots in the labor market, prison numbers, and possible cannon fodder in military conquests. Teachers are reduced to technicians and supervisors in the education assembly line- “objects” rather than “subjects” of history. This system is fundamentally about the negation of human agency, despite the good intentions of individuals at all levels. (p. 179)

Lipman’s observations illustrate the negative perceptions some holding power hold of those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and racial minorities. McLaren echoes Lipman in asserting that schools focus on creating compliant and patriotic workers and often do not result in committed, critical citizens. Education, he holds, is “designed to create individuals who operate in the interest of the state, whose social function is primarily to sustain and legitimate the status quo” (p. 1). Emphasis on standardized testing and accountability has resulted in policy which deskills teachers, reducing them to “semiskilled, low paid clerk(s)” (McLaren, 1989, p. 162). Educational differences are further reflected within competitive or open markets, where students from low socioeconomic backgrounds fill the nation’s worst schools.

Opponents of NCLB held that it failed in increasing educational equality. In his work with the Civil Rights Project a Harvard University, Orfield (2006) held:

Neither a significant rise in achievement, nor closure of the racial achievement gap is being achieved...The reported state successes are artifacts of the state testing policies which lead to apparent gains on state tests [which] do not show up on an independent national test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress. (p. 5)

These policy outcomes take root in historical racism from which the country built its foundation via institutionalized slavery. Due to internalized oppression and racism, elitist views may be found within various segments of society regardless of race or socioeconomic status. Such a framework when used in viewing others' circumstances fosters our contemporary "age of indifference" (West, 2004). This indifference thwarts movement towards true democracy, which comprises an egalitarian society, where equitable policy is the norm. Ironically, emphasis upon accountability via high stakes testing in some cases coincide with when elections take place. In such an environment, are children being used for political gain?

Gains not reflected in national tests reflect reports of "poorly constructed" state assessments (Hursh, 2009 in Ayers, p. 159). High stakes testing stifled educational achievement of New York students who once held the lowest graduation rates in the nation for African Americans and Latino/as (35% and 31% respectively) (Orfield, Lasen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004, p. 159). Janesick (2007) refers to high stakes testing as a form of violence or "injury by distortion, infringement, or profanation" against our youth. She argues that distortion takes place via the manipulation of actual scores to secure federal monies, that class time and learning are infringed upon, and that the use of class time for drilling is overused. Gillborn (2009) notes in his work on education policy and reform:

...policy-makers (and many educationists) tend to imagine education policy as evolving over time, sometimes with dramatic changes in focus, but always (so policy-makers assure us) with the best of intentions for all. This sanitized (white-washed) version of history envisions policy as a rational process of change, with each step building incrementally on its predecessor in a more-or-less linear and evolutionary fashion. But such an approach is contrary to the reality of race and politics in England where virtually every major public policy meant to improve race equity has risen *directly* from resistance and protest by Black and other minoritized communities. (p. 51-52, 2009, italic by author)

Hence, change came about by the countering of negative social dogma against marginalized groups. As Fredrick Douglass held, "without struggle there can be no progress..." What human emotions lead to exclusionary policies? Fear? Scarcity? Insecurity? "Dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed" (Freire, p. 44, 2006) via these negative emotions. What pedagogical strategies might be employed to counter these lower levels of human emotions and lead to stronger policies that foster social justice and equity for all? The following section offers suggestions.

Educating and Training Leaders for a Democratic Global Workforce

Exclusionary practices cannot yield organization or social outcomes rooted in justice, fairness and maximum productivity, as these polar opposites halt such outcomes from emerging. In essence, the two are inharmonious or incompatible. The core of democracy counters exclusion, featuring the voice, participation, and representation of all. This democratic tenet holds at macro (federal and state government), meso (organizations or institutions), and micro levels (from units of organizations and institutions to individual families) in society and organizations. Should democratic outcomes be a desired goal, elements of equality and justice must infuse thought during the policy making process and be communicated as well as embraced by those charged with implementation. The nexus of individuals and the collective regarding policy and its results may provide a starting point in reaching such a collective democratic consciousness. Democratic consciousness counters fear based

exclusionary thinking that promote ineffective policy, while simultaneously transforms the hearts and minds of all involved. However, transformation may take time and likely be influenced by social dogma and the individual racial identity development of policy leaders (Davis, 2010).

Those who employ critical pedagogy often utilize higher order, critical, and dialectical thinking skills; have an emancipatory outlook; and value the humanity of individuals (2007). Critical pedagogy starts with basic assumptions of equality and excellence shared by both the marginalized and those at the center. Authentic assessment comprises drawing upon portfolios, journals, mentor-protégée or peer evaluations, and other demonstrations of the learner's knowledge. This form of assessment requires innovation and "allows many opportunities to practice, rehearse, consult, get feedback, and refine actual performances and productions" (Wiggins, 1998, p. 242). The practice reflects attending to what Vygotsky referred to as the Zone of Proximal Development or "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978). Beginning with these positive tenets at the onset increases the likelihood of positive outcomes. The innovation prompted by authentic assessment serves as a key element of developing an informed citizenry. It moves us away from the frivolous to profound, critical consciousness (West, 2004).

Gardner's Five Minds

Howard Gardner notes the importance of life-long learning and individuals taking charge of their own education (2004). This is particularly important given our contemporary, global economy. Workers who continue to "stay ahead of the curve" will benefit, while those resting on their laurels risk becoming unemployable (Gardner, 2004, p.147). Such an environment renders those who have not been nurtured to become lifelong learners particularly vulnerable to unstable economic tides. This form of vulnerability ultimately renders continued intergenerational poverty amongst the at-risk population in which Lipman refers. Policy may play a role in promoting life-long learning throughout every segment of society. While individuals clearly have agency in this regard within their own personal lives, societies can either work or thwart mass understanding and movement towards a culture of learning. This culture of learning holds the potential of contributing to a more stable economic democracy.

Gardner identifies "five minds" critical to cultivate for the future. The disciplinary mind utilizes forms of thinking related to major disciplines and professions. Lifelong learning, diligent application, and constancy demonstrate this type of mind. The disciplinary mind emerges during adolescence and has the potential to continue throughout the life span. The synthesizing mind abstracts critical information from large sets of data and interprets the information for use. It ideally begins in childhood, becoming deliberate over one's life as new information arises. The creating mind moves beyond current thought to form alternative questions, solutions, or expanding existing ways of knowing. The creation builds upon one or more established fields of study. Such a mind requires a degree of cultivation of the synthesizing and disciplined minds. The respectful mind reacts sympathetically and in a constructive manner to individual and group differences. Moving beyond tolerance and political correctness in working to understand and reach out to others, the ethical mind seeks both excellence in work and as a citizen.

Conclusion

Gardner's multifaceted approach provides a strong model for leadership training. Leaders, particularly in the education sector, hold the capacity to positively influence minds and lives. When the economy calls for employees to retool, Gardner's five minds and critical pedagogy promise to contribute to the retooling process. Such an education moves nations towards greater innovation and competitiveness within a global marketplace.

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