

**Educating to Be Democratic:
Pedagogy as a Strategy**

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As per researches in various disciplines, if there could be a magical medicine that every member of a given society could ingest to guarantee a thriving democracy, it will certainly take the form of high quality education for all. Borrowing Professor Seeley's definition that 'Democracy is a form of government in which everyone has a share,'

the essence of everyone being an actor or player in a successful democracy has to be instilled as a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experiences, at a very young age, as this education is a prerequisite for the survival and the success of the democratic society which upholds values like equality, fraternity, dignity of individual, cooperation, sharing of responsibility etc. Besides, a democracy upholds promises of exploitation free existence, equal work opportunities according to abilities and capacities, and fundamental rights that ensure fullest development of individuals and their personalities. Social justice and paramount faith in the worth of the common man which are central to a thriving democracy ensures that there is no domination of power or privilege in a single individual or a group. To live in such a system that envisages fraternity, liberty and responsibility as its working principles, citizens need to be educated and trained which makes education the key to the success of a democratic society. Teachers being the agents of this instrument that enrich the strengths and overcomes the weaknesses of the people, face the daunting challenge of making themselves epitomes of democratic values reflecting the principles of democracy in the classroom, whether be in delivering the curriculum, classroom methodology, administration or organisation. The interactions in a classroom must have the subtle goal of objectively understanding the plethora of social, political, cultural, philosophical, and economic problems, and also assist in forming independent

judgments on complicated problems that would go beyond the individual satisfaction to common good.

Being Democratic: Teacher modelling

Educators are becoming increasingly aware of the need to instill the principles of life in a democracy at an early age and also to develop it gradually with realistic sense of rights and responsibilities in young minds. A learning of this kind has to go beyond slavish obedience to understanding, respectful acceptance and tolerance of the people, systems and practices around. A system that is genuinely democratic allows enquiries and criticism in the absence of which flaws in assumptions and inadequacies of realities will remain uncorrected. Unless the inadequacies are questioned and dissents are expressed, erroneous decisions and outdated views shall remain routinely imposed on people by those in positions of authority. Though dissent is an integral part of any democracy, dissent management is an art that must be taught for which classrooms may be the right place and teachers the best facilitators. Students must get acquainted to values that uphold a democracy in all their day to day interactions within and outside the classroom. These may include interactions between students, among teachers, between students and teachers or even with the administration. In other words, every educational institution has a culture of which each stake holder becomes a part. The teacher being the closest representative for the students, it becomes

necessary to take conscious efforts to act this part out.

Socrates has been referred to as one of the greatest teachers of democracy and his method has been referred to as the Socratic method of dialogue. Of late this method has been promoted as a commendable way of developing critical and analytical thinking in modern class rooms. Being a space occupied by a pool of varying talents, knowledge levels and backgrounds, the credibility of this approach comes from the opportunities this method offers for free expression of genuine creative thoughts. In their work *Dialogic Pedagogy: The Importance of Dialogue in Teaching and Learning*, Dr. Skidmore and Murakami observes that the credit for initiating dialogic pedagogy goes to Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher, whose theory has been enormously influential on the tradition of critical pedagogy. In his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, generally considered one of the foundational texts of the critical pedagogy movement, he has drawn a distinction between the 'banking concept of education' and 'problem-posing education'. In the banking concept of education, 'knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider know nothing' (Freire, 1993:53). In the problem-posing education, students are acknowledged as fellow beings capable of consciousness and intentionality, who are treated co-investors into the nature of reality. Here the teachers enter into a

dialogue with his/her students. This dialogue is considered indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality. In his words,

Banking education treats students as objects of assistance; problem posing education makes them critical thinkers. Banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the intentionality of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Problem posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in enquiry and creative transformation. Problem posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming, as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality(Freire, 64-65)

Freire's dialogic pedagogy has been founded on an understanding of knowing as a social activity, although it has an individual dimension. When a teacher becomes the authority who knows and transfers what he/she knows to the students, it socialises them into a state of passivity whereas dialogic pedagogy invites them to participate actively in reshaping their own understanding of reality and demonstrates an alternative mode of communicative practice in the classroom. The teacher in such a classroom assumes a leadership authority as the leader of the learning process and

also relearns with the students. He/ she exercises authority in steering the development of the collective learning activity and unlike the authoritarian teacher doesn't demand slavish obedience or resist questioning. The dialogic teacher's authority has a democratic character. A teacher's competence is here demonstrated in the way the learning process is directed for the students. Teacher's authority here is earned on the basis of experience and rests on the basis of a respect for the other that bridges the gap between their different social positions. Freire also states that the democratic nature of a teacher's authority also means that not everyone has to speak in the course of a dialogic lesson, but they make a contribution when they have something to add to what had already been said. Here the everyday knowledge of the students is brought into the class room, and validates reflection and critical examination of their experience of the world outside the classroom and is a method that need not be confined to subjects like literacy education and humanities.

Collaborating for curiosity

Classroom practices fostering curiosity have always been lauded ideal though the spatial and temporal constraints leave a significant gap between theory and practice in real time. Research suggests that curiosity enhances retention span and has also been linked to a wide range of adaptive behaviours including tolerance of anxiety and uncertainty, positive emotions, humour, out of the box thinking

and a noncritical attitude. All these attributes have been associated with healthy social outcomes and more impressively, been kept at the heart of lifelong learning. To live fully productive lives as contributive citizens of a democracy, young minds must be equipped to find creative solutions for the pertinent problems faced by industry and society. Classroom interactions and pedagogy must foster intellectual life through emphasis on critical thinking and open enquiry, and precision of thought and expression. This is best developed through collaborative learning. In his essay ‘The Dimensions of Curiosity’, the author, using fractals as a modern metaphor for modern sensibilities, states that curiosity is a form of behaviour that encourages travelling along fractal dimensions. A curious mind seeks to explore more than local dimensions, other dimensions of one’s physical and intellectual space, failing which one may find oneself ill prepared for the challenges from unfamiliar world views. A citizen of a democracy cannot be spared of curiosity on two grounds here - in developing observations and enquiry, and in broadening ones views to accommodate differences and dissent. Anatole Frances’s observation, ‘the whole art of teaching is only the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards’ may be a good starting point. Studies indicate five types of curiosity as relevant for professional work too viz. specific, diversive, social, perceptual and epistemic. Social curiosity is the interest to know about other people and cultivating it requires a pluralistic, non-

judgemental way of engagement whereas specific curiosity is the curiosity to engage with specific problems. Developing diverse curiosity helps deal with ambiguity in problem solving and boosts problem solving. Though perceptual curiosity is natural to all of us, lack of it can affect both diverse and social curiosity. A curious mind facilitates genuine enquiry along with deep listening, which promotes intense learning unleashing the power of young minds to take risks. Kathy Taberner, Kirsten Taberner Siggins in their work *The Power of Curiosity: How to Have Real Conversations That Create Collaboration, Innovation and Understanding* states:

For the first time we have a younger generation that has access to more information than the one before it. Older generations can no longer presume to know the experiences of those much younger than themselves. Effective leadership now requires a flatter, more transparent, collaborative approach, because the top down model of leadership no longer works- in the workplace or at home. The traditional knowledge bearers must now adjust, atleast in the area of technology, to sharing this role with their much younger counterparts, and this can be a difficult adaptation- one to which much adults are unaccustomed. In the Information Age, organisations want engagement, collaboration, innovation, inspiration and accountability- skills that are currently expected of leaders, yet not being taught.” (xvii)

Beyond the necessity of generating curiosity in young learning minds, Taberner points to a greater challenge that the teacher facilitator has to address in the Information Age-collaboration and an adaptation that the teacher-leader is forced to acquire with his/her younger counterparts. John Dewey the twentieth century American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer whose ideas have been influential in education and social reform, calls education the means of social continuity of life. Life he defines, as a self-renewing process through action upon the environment. He adds that society exists through a process of transmission whereby ideals, hopes, expectations, standards and opinions, and habits of doing, thinking and feeling are communicated from the older to the younger. This renewal not being an automatic process, Dewey warns that, “unless pains are taken to see that genuine and thorough transmission takes place, the most civilised group will relapse into barbarism and then into savagery”. Classrooms that aid democratic principles must transmit a communication that insures participation in a common understanding which secures ‘similar emotional and intellectual dispositions or ‘like mindedness’ as sociologists call it. Traditional mode of giving and taking being long outdated and undemocratic in execution, Dewey states that methods and strategies are to be promoted which would effect a sharing of purposes, a communication of interests, as social life is identical with communication and all communication is educative. In these processes of communication,

which he calls an art, both the recipient and the one who communicates are affected, enlarging and changing experiences, resulting in modification of attitudes. Modern terminology calls this collaborative approach.

When this is practised, classrooms transform into democratic, collaborative learning spaces, where inspiration and innovation shall be natural by-products. Collaborated efforts serve a great deal towards the expansion of views and curiosity. 2002 Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman in his book *Thinking: Fast and Slow*, shares his experience of collaborative work with a younger scholar named Amos. He recalls how they enjoyed the extraordinary good fortune of a shared mind which he sees much superior to individual minds. Beyond the sharing, Daniel Kahneman values the relationship that made their work fun as well as productive. He frankly admits that their collaboration on judgment and decision making was the reason for the Nobel Prize he received, which he strongly believes, Amos would have shared with him, had he not died in 1996.

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