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Lessons from the History of Pedagogical Methods for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning

Sona Balasanyan

Abstract

The chapter discusses educational practices drawing on examples from the history of pedagogical methods across classic to postmodern realities. It aims at deriving lessons through the exploration of global social contexts of teaching and learning to address diversity and multiculturalism in contemporary education. Accentuating the history of educational practices, pedagogical methods are presented as socially constructed phenomena, while teachers and learners are viewed as possessing socialised knowledge. The chapter concludes with reflections on the pursuit of educational aims as referred to culturally responsive teaching and learning and multiculturalism in contemporary education. It shows that the present world has created diverse forms of pedagogical methods and education is no longer the prerogative of formal education. The teachers and learners are freer from social and physical boundaries. They are more likely to reflect on what they teach and learn. On the other hand, this reflection is hard to achieve in an increasingly entertaining surrounding of new technologies and self-representation. This is one important barrier that teachers and learners have to overcome in order to assure culturally responsive education in the contemporary world. However, they can be more reflexive towards the past in doing so.

Keywords: socialised knowledge, history of pedagogical methods, diversity, culturally responsive education

1. Introduction

Galileo Galilei was asked by the church to refrain from teaching his ideas, and, as Albert Camus mentions, “Galileo, who held a scientific truth of great importance, abjured it with the greatest ease as soon as it endangered his life” ([1], pp. 1–2). This was a sound example of impossibility of teaching as referred to truths that might not be easily socially accepted or that were not socialised into a given society.

As mentioned by Mangez and colleagues ([2], p. 15), the mandates and professional identities of teachers are historically defined around the twofold task of teaching and socialisation.

In their educational practices, teachers and learners have historically adhered to social opportunities and barriers for education within various social contexts.

Application of pedagogical methods has been culturally sensitive [3]. However, previously (within the classic and modern realities) schools could count on a number of “certainties” that were “taken for granted” as to, for example, what was to be expected from a “good” pupil or a “good” teacher, while now the normative references are shattered ([2], pp. 2–3). Currently the “socialised knowledge” is complex and dynamic as are the societies where this knowledge originates from.

In the contemporary postmodern world, the push for more culturally responsive education acknowledges that in racially, ethnically, sexually, and religiously diverse societies, teachers can best educate students by appreciation of culturally defined experiences and understandings that students bring with them to schools ([4], p. 27). It is here that historical development of common or shared educational practices through social construction of education becomes important to see the great difficulty of getting agreement as to what may be the moral content of teaching [5].

History of pedagogical methods shows that boundaries of knowing are set within social space and time. Each time teachers and learners engage with pedagogical methods, they maintain or alter their beliefs and accepted ways of knowing.

This chapter argues and shows that knowledge is always socialised and even the most innovative teachers and learners are the bearers of their social realities. Further, the more they are conscious about these realities, the better they can utilise their educational practices. The exploration of social problematics of historically located pedagogical methods means, among other things, to accentuate what are the social opportunities for the utilisation of these methods [12].

The discussion of historicity of educational practices does not claim to be objective or universal in this chapter. It relies on nuanced and well-defended description of possible forms or examples of knowing and knowledge transmission within classic, modern, and postmodern worlds. The chapter offers one way to conceptualise pedagogical methods by presenting a brief social history of educational practices around the world [6] to derive lessons from this exploration for possible cultural responsiveness in contemporary multicultural and diverse educational environments.

The chapter applies the general idea that there is a world of social history of pedagogical methods and education is a historical phenomenon, the ultimate goal of which has been the transmission of culture(s) [7–9].

In the course of the chapter classic, modern and postmodern realities are seen as paradigms indicative for the development of world education. Classic paradigm is characterised by “directness” of world and cultural perceptions, while modern paradigm explicates a scattered reality formed around capitalist or industrial world. Postmodernism is described as an emerging paradigm indicative of world diversity and possible reflexivity towards the variety of past educational experiences [7, 10, 11].

History of educational practices presented in the chapter is a subjective account of teaching and learning experiences [12, 13]. It is not meant to be and should not be perceived as comprehensive. It is rather to provoke discussion on possibilities and barriers for educational practices. It is also to illustrate an example of writing a brief social history of educational practices with the aim to derive lessons for present times of education.

2. Pedagogical methods from classic to postmodern realities

2.1 Lessons from the classic world

Reflections of social scientists on the history of education in classic times frequently refer to geographical locations and ages or epochs: ancient oriental worlds, Ancient Greece, Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Enlightenment ([7], pp. 14–26).

Ancient Chinese and Indian societies heavily contributed to the construction of education in the oriental worlds. Chinese teachers and learners were described as traditional and disciplined. Chinese education was perceived as “well measured and shaped” ([7], pp. 7–9). The Chinese society recognised three authorities—the emperor (or the governor), the parent, and the teacher. Teaching and learning in this society in classic times would normally take place in a room of an educational house. The walls of the room would be decorated with papers reflecting thoughts of wise men. The classrooms were furnished with small desks and benches for pupils and a larger desk and a tribune for the teacher ([7], p. 9). For the Chinese people, it was essential that a teacher should be strict and pedagogical methods adjusted to this belief. The normative expectation towards a teacher was that he/she should be an authority. The school in classical China would not be open for some hours and would not shut down at all: the schoolchildren would be able to come home early or postpone their class or stay in the educational house as much as they wanted. The learners had flexibility in teaching hours, teaching could take place at every moment whenever the learner wanted, and the reputed teacher, in this case, would have an individual approach towards the learner.

Chinese philosophers, such as Lao Tzu and Confucius, emphasised the role of education and knowledge as utilised within society [13]. Confucius mentioned that knowledge is first congenital and then acquired. The representatives of the Chinese society had respect towards people who they believed were born with innate knowledge. Nevertheless, they valued acquired knowledge more as they knew that knowledge transmitted and received with great difficulty required social efforts. They emphasised the importance of pedagogy as far as it enabled being in a society or possessing social skills, and consequently they devalued lessons that would not be useful for life. A teacher who neglected socially significant knowledge was not respected. Knowing for Chinese people would mean to know things and to act upon these things, to understand socially defined and accepted truths and have own judgments. The nature, individual thinking, and the society were important values on which the educational practices were built. “Shall I teach you what knowledge is? When you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it; - this is knowledge”—said Confucius which is an important call for self-reflection made by a teacher ([14], p. 15).

“Students form a group. They read and repeat letters at loud and write them down on the sand. Two other students write on palm leaves. Another one reads short stories, another one cuts pieces of paper, and a pupil reads the Mahabharata. The teacher occasionally approaches the pupils and answers any questions they may have”—this is a description of an Indian classroom in classic times ([7], p. 11). One can imagine the individual approach of the teacher towards the learners. The school in India was considered to be complete for a pupil when he/she knew writing, reading, and arithmetic. But there was solid groundwork between the instructor and the family of the learner which was indicative of the reputation of the teacher in this society and the closeness of teachers to families.

Through the interdependence of the teacher’s and the learner’s families, the teacher taught both at the schoolhouse and at the learner’s home, which proves the interconnection of the family and education in India. Families invited the teachers to their homes, asking for advice for the child or the learner ([7], pp. 11–12). It is not by chance that the Vedic literature attributed significant importance to teaching being about “sitting next to the teacher”. The teacher was seen as a bright man in this society who could discover the truth. Teachers and learners recognised two sources of knowledge—the person and the ultimate foundation of all things.

The Indian society, as a consequence of successful operation of the perceived truth (in its understanding of the essence of things and rational action), considered

consciousness and knowledge as basic means for transmitting of socially significant knowledge, for recognising what can be learnt as truth. The foundational value for education practices in this society was in the development of individual consciousness as part of the natural whole where this consciousness was contented ([15], p. 26).

The philosophers and teachers in ancient Greece had faith in human resources and saw happiness in the expansion of human capital. Greece, under the domination of the Roman Empire, first embraced the traditions of Sparta's physical education and then the educational developments of Athens ([7], p. 12).

Music was the most popular subject taught in Greece, while in Rome it was not even taught. The Romans considered the priorities of gymnastics as an important subject and were guided by the principle of "multum, non multa" (the principle of "much, not many" education implies that formal education should not merely introduce too many things but should encourage reflection on culture). In the Spartan society, pedagogical methods were fueling the necessity of continuing education, so that the empire would grow its military influence. On the contrary, in Greece they so valued "just thinking" that sophism developed. Socrates saw the way out of sophism through the development of loyalty and self-esteem ([7], pp. 12–13).

It is known that one of the first models of an educational system was proposed by the Greek philosopher Plato. According to him, the purpose of teaching was to create individuals to perform functions that met their specific social status (as defined by the education system) so that the learners would be ready to fulfill their social roles. According to the Platonic testimony of classroom-based teaching, the structure of the society could preserve its quality through education. The education system described by Plato was elite with only two subjects taught by soldiers and philosophers. Those who were prepared to become philosophers were selected from a very young age. Greek philosopher Aristotle thought that pedagogy should be directed towards three basic goals: healing of body and mind and development of consciousness. He identified two groups of subjects: those that prepared the learners for citizenship and those that developed their personality ([7], pp. 12–18).

In the Middle Ages, the world history was closely linked to religion and mostly the spreading of Christianity. Schools and universities were operating within the churches and were scholastic in nature. Pedagogical methods were directed to justify religious beliefs. This is one basic reason why afterwards when the religious and scientific institutions separated [16], the way of thinking that was detached from reality and recognised idols was labeled as "scholastic" ([7], p. 136). In all of the countries of the Middle Ages, public education was seen as a threat to society as the "humble" population (the working class) could turn away from publicly owned work and get resistant; hence, education was not meant for masses. The stream of protest beliefs influenced the adoption and development of mass education only by the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries ([7], pp. 52–53, [16]).

The first university, the University of Bologna, was already established in the eleventh century. Oxford, and Cambridge, Paris and Copenhagen universities were being established and developed from eleventh to fifteenth centuries with major faculties of arts, medicine, law, and theology. In the faculties of arts that later became philosophical, the subjects of grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music were thought. These universities were providing elite education of scholastic nature which made them very different from the universities of the nineteenth century [16, 17]. However, the very establishment of universities was to prove that pedagogy started to concentrate around educational settings (and not within houses or churches as was during classic times).

Three forms of being of the classical societies followed each other: theological, metaphysical, and enlightening. In its theological form, the classical society

followed polytheism through myths and epics. Then, the scholastic society was concentrated on churches and there was political disobedience [18]. Science and pedagogy before the enlightenment were focused on classifications and dogmas ([11], pp. 14–26). It was the enlightenment era that created the foundations for humanist pedagogy, accentuating critical thinking eventually leading to the split between science and church ([7], p. 27).

Mass demand towards education was growing ([7], pp. 14–26). The world society was entering a new stage shifting from elite education to mass education which was meant to utilise enlightened forms of pedagogical methods.

2.2 Lessons from the modern world

Typical pedagogical methods in the industrial age did not follow the ideology of humanist pedagogy. The educators of the time were often described as “state servants”—transmitters of knowledge to strengthen national ideologies [16].

The major influence that the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods had on the formation of modern society was through the principle of natural equality in education and the spread of mass education.

Karl Marx thought that the type of relationship in classic society was “personal dependence.” There was a dogma of thinking and behavior. The fact that the upper class had a privileged position in the modern world was an indisputable and unchanging factor. Such ideas typical to, for example, Machiavelli, were unexpected exceptions in terms of knowledge transmitted and received in the modern societies [16]. From Plato’s philosophy to the Hegelian historical idealism, educational practices of the classic societies dominated the educational reality. A widespread debate over the issue of education started in the nineteenth century. Providing free and widespread public education in the nineteenth century was the most important issue for the state policy of the civilised countries [7].

In nineteenth-century Germany, with the advent of the Enlightenment, a new type of educational reality emerged, which was characterised as “ignorant” towards the classical dogmatism and a new society, a new mentality of the German Humboldtian education developed. In modern times, education transformed into a social unit whereby the mobility from one social class to another became possible [7, 17, 18].

Modern societies were very different from classic societies as these were characterised by transitions from one extreme modernist ideological structure to another. Socialist and liberal ideologies were dominating. However, as Toffler said, both socialist and liberalist ideologies were the result of one major capitalist ideology [19].

Did authoritarian forms of sociality collapse in modern society? According to Fromm [19], the social structures of classic society united into one social reality where freedom became “a culture for profit-making”. Relying on the Marxian logic, one may conclude that the development of modern society was characterised by the personal independence of teachers driven by their national dependencies. Teaching became a social interaction for raising the price of commodities, qualification of the workforce, and the potential of national capital.

Toffler [20] believed that pedagogical methods of capitalist or modernist societies were directed to preparing learners for factory life. Obviously, the needs of the industrial systems of the modern world were accommodated by the institute of education. Pedagogical methods were designed to teach precision and agility through well-trained mechanical thinking. The state economy was a major value for the modern world. It guided the construction and management of public life through state policies. By the end of the nineteenth century, the appeal of scholars

against the social system and modern education was growing. Carnegie said that the worst thing that could happen to a nineteenth-century young man was to receive higher education ([21], pp. 187–222). The modern era, and especially the USSR society, formed and developed an educational program that rejected everything unfit for the concept of state ownership (e.g., talent was rejected). One had to constantly live in obedience. A person used to go to kindergarten in the USSR, then become a pioneer, then get higher education (if wanted), but in every educational setting (openly or in a latent form), he/she was trained to be an “exemplary citizen” and, ultimately, a “subject of pride” for his/her society [20].

From the very first steps of the establishment of Soviet education, the idea of forming a “new type of a person/citizen for the nation” was widespread, as a result of which the main focus of pedagogical methods was on public and nonindividual knowledge and the collectivist ethics.

Foucault believed that education in modern societies, through collectivist-intellectual thinking and state power, was a superficial means for development, but it was in vain at the individual level, and this was the devastating defect of that education [10].

Mass education, especially in the industrial age, became the basis for the formation of an “educational market” and, albeit serving nationalistic and political ideologies, the number of educational settings worldwide increased. The increase in the number of educational settings would then lead to a new interconnectedness of qualitative social changes. It became publicly accepted that education was a personal need. Individualisation of education and pedagogical methods became more and more important, and the introduction of new means of promoting participation of learners in education was signified. Introduction of new measures to promote participation of learners in educational processes (and the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered pedagogical methods) led to massive changes in educational practice creating space for application of humanist pedagogy.

2.3 Lessons from the postmodern world

Fukuyama noted that the modern age was centered on the ideology of social institutions, and, as a result, societies around the world became either monarchic or fascist or socialist [22]. The modern world was an arena for clashes of ideologies also in pedagogies. In the postmodern world, all social institutions (institutions of education are no exception) have pledged to be liberal-democratic, enabling the formation of new pedagogies for decentralised and global society. Technological advances and information flows created greater complexity in understanding of pedagogical methods and their social environments [23, 24].

The main idea behind the postmodern society was and still is diversity [25]. “Let’s fight against totalitarianism, let’s activate diversity,” said Leotard [26]. The modern world came to an end when this claim was publicly and massively legitimised, when society began to be perceived as the society of “posts”: “post-totalitarian,” “post-authoritarian,” “post-international,” “postindustrial,” etc. Such a change was conditioned by factors external and internal to educational institutions. All of these factors exist in postmodern society to this day, and teaching is different and yet unified across countries and cultures. Popularisation of education is one important feature of postmodern society promoting the emergence of the so-called knowledge society or information society [27–29].

The sharp increase in educational attainment in major countries of the world was the first factor contributing to the change of educational practices from modern to postmodern societies. The need for rapid allocation of educational resources

emerged. This put emphasis on effective internal management and quality assurance of education which has been attributed to the social demand for teaching and learning. For example, since 1985, educational institutions in the United States have operated towards increase in teaching participation, learning outcomes, assessment of quality of academic programs, quality control with the aim of efficiently allocating human and material resources to educational outcomes. This is a process which, having the same basis of existence but different illustrations, continues to spread all around the world ([21], pp. 187–222). This process increased the power of learners to influence their educational attainment as they began to perceive themselves as decisive subjects for education. Growth in the number of teachers and learners across countries and across educational institutions has led to the perception of teachers and learners as very diverse social groups. This was another factor contributing to the modifications of educational experiences which are to react to the demand for services that would simultaneously accommodate various teachers and learners in different contexts (regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, gender, etc.).

Important characteristics of postmodern pedagogy emerged due to technological advancement. Technologies have been the most important means by which global economic development impacted sectors of societies (also education). Technological development enabled creation of virtual universities/learning environments and distance learning systems, which naturally created a community of teachers and learners unique to the space and time of the postmodern world. Diversity of educational processes increased. Technologies created new opportunities for teachers and learners to collaborate with other social communities and organisations. Increasingly, people gained public understanding of the fact that they are educated at every moment of their lives. Innovative or advanced teaching methods imply education through modifications that address diverse problems in the society, diverse people, and their cultures. At the same time, it is not senseless to suppose that such complex formation of educational practices jeopardised the very predetermination of the ultimate reproduction of socially essential and socialised knowledge since the focus is on the ways of knowledge delivery rather than the knowledge itself.

Baudrillard believed that the postmodern society should be described as a reality of nonmaterialised symbolic meanings attributed to the material world [30, 31]. There is a crisis of authentication; there is no clear distinction between the real reality and the symbolic reality; therefore, there is no reality, and teaching is directed to creation of simulations. Foucault's portrayal of society where there are no ultimate truths seems to be more than applicable in the case of the postmodern world [10]. Everything (also teaching) is uncontrollable but is still perceived as manageable. According to Derrida, the life of postmodern society is a constant self-representation, and the individuals—the teachers, the learners—are passive observers of this representation [32]. They are present at the societies only physically, but their minds are complex “traveling” around the world through the Internet and technologies which have significantly reduced social space and time [20]. This is a society where, according to Derrida, power is subordination, meaning is meaningless, and therefore teaching is nonteaching—pedagogical methods cannot be easily framed or defined [32].

In the postmodern society, the social space is increasingly separated from the physical space and is accelerated in social time. Globalisation is predetermining changes in educational experiences. Educational practices originate in accord to the logic of globalisation and multicultural practices.

Giddens emphasises that in recent human history, mankind and the society are far more close to each other than during other times [23]. From this perspective, social phenomena are reflective projects that are constantly changing and renewable. Teachers are learners which are freer from social and physical boundaries, so

that they are more likely to reflect on what they teach and learn, but this reflection is harder in an increasingly entertaining surrounding of new technologies.

3. Conclusions

Lessons from the classic world showed that the parent and the teacher were respected authorities in the past. The reflection towards thoughts of wise men was accentuated; there was flexibility in teaching hours. The role of education and knowledge as utilised within society, self-reflection, loyalty, and self-esteem of learners was valued by the teachers. Individual approach towards education was accompanied by the closeness of teachers to families and development of learners as citizens. The principle of “much, not many” education implied that formal education should not merely introduce too many things but should encourage reflection on culture.

The modern world legitimised that mobility from one social class to another was possible; however, teaching became a social interaction for raising the price of commodities, qualification of the workforce, and the potential of national capital. Education followed collective ideologies and was in vain at the individual level. As individualisation of education and pedagogical methods became more and more important in the context of legitimised mass education, the introduction of new means of promoting participation of learners in education became important creating grounds for the development of postmodern educational practices.

With postmodernism, pedagogies for decentralised and global society emerged. Technological advances and information flows created greater complexity in understanding of pedagogical methods. Popularisation of education occurred; rapid allocation of educational resources took place. Teachers and learners hence became decisive subjects for education to react to the demand for services that would simultaneously accommodate various teachers and learners in different contexts (regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, gender, etc.). Self-representation became a very important part for applying pedagogical methods.

Lessons from postmodernism showed that pedagogical methods cannot be easily framed or defined; educational practices originate in accord to the logic of globalisation and multicultural practices.

As social phenomena are reflective projects that are constantly changing and renewable, teachers and learners are freer from social and physical boundaries. They are more likely to reflect on what they teach and learn. On the other hand, this reflection is hard to achieve in an increasingly entertaining surrounding of new technologies. This is one important barrier that teachers and learners have to overcome in order to assure culturally sensitive education in the contemporary world. However, they can be more reflexive towards the past in doing so.

The history of educational practices shows that the less the members of the societies perceived each other as teachers and learners on a daily bases, the more likely it was that the social privilege of educational institutions to produce and reproduce socialised knowledge would increase. Public perception of education as a socially inaccessible value emerged in classic times when the public perceived education to occur only within educational settings (as physical space). The society realised the importance of the role of individual teachers in classic and modern worlds.

The more teaching was perceived as relevant to all individuals and to societies in general, the more likely it was that awareness of educational opportunities outside educational settings would increase. Education would then be perceived as social value available to anyone. Educational settings were viewed as one way of getting education, but educational opportunities outside these settings gained significant importance. Every individual started to be seen as a potential teacher and learner.

The likelihood of the society to be perceived as a “learning or knowledge or information society” increased. This is what happened in the postmodern world.

The analysis presented in this chapter therefore explicated the importance of understanding of educational practices and pedagogical methods associated with social environments, space, and time—the history (and subjective accounts of it). This is to see the societal directives of knowledge production and what educational practices the teachers and learners are likely to perform or may perform.

The present world has created diverse forms of pedagogical methods. Education is no longer the prerogative of formal educational settings. This leaves space for the hypothesis that classic and modern forms of educational practices (concentrated in physical educational settings and on individuals) have been modified. Yet what are the implications of this on individual teachers and learners, and the pedagogical methods these teachers and learners utilise are still a matter of continued research in the historicity of educational practices.

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