

The Relevance of Popular Education in Higher Education

“ Popular education is always contextual and contingent, reflecting and responding to changing circumstance” Ian Martin, Popular Education Forum in Scotland.

Popular educators facilitate the flow of knowledge and draw on the existing knowledge of the group valuing emotive and creative knowledge as well as facts.

Two different models of education:

Behaviouralist Approach-

Assumes students are receivers of knowledge (jug and mug approach) that they are passive. Teachers are the experts and educational performance can be measured.

Constructivist-

Knowledge is dynamic, the classroom is not the only educational resource, learning is co-operative, hierarchy between student teacher has to be overcome- students are active agents.

Participatory and Action based approaches

The methods used reflect the philosophy of the approach. Using both together constitutes popular education.

- METHODS
- based on an interactive approach for example- the use of time lines, brainstorming, activities.
- Linking local experiences with global perspectives
- using suitable research tools that are varied and interesting
- involving participants in the planning, development and dissemination of the research
- Deriving curriculum from interests/ aspirations and lived experiences of its students. “Knowledge from below.”
- OBJECTIVES
- To co-produce knowledge within the group
- To focus on group development rather than individual progress
- To emphasise co-operation as opposed to international competition
- To increase self esteem and abilities
- To link knowledge and action
- Not lifelong learning but learning for living
- To challenge inequalities
- To promote active citizenship

Why popular education?

Autonomy: the power or right of self government- the Kantian doctrine that the human will carry its guiding principles within itself, self governing.

- Education is vital to develop autonomous thought and action.
- Many of our social relations are created in the classroom
- How we teach is as important as what we teach in order to promote co-operation, respect and uncover exploitation.

Moral Education

All education comes with some sort of moral perspective but frequently this is not acknowledged. If education cannot be neutral what ethics or morals do we bring with us when we are teaching? Popular education openly states its political purpose to empower and for the educator to not act as the group's liberator but rather enter in to dialogue.

Popular Education and Social Movements.

The history of popular education is rooted in Latin American social movements. Pioneered by Paulo Freire who wrote the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, (1996, Penguin). Popular education contributes to the defence and extension of social democracy and the rights of citizenship.

Social Movements- movements of people in civil society which cohere around issues which they themselves define as significant.

- common cause
- antagonistic relations to another group (i.e they are for something and against something else)
- normative orientation (i.e- mobilising around ethical or moral code or set of beliefs which reflect shared values and purposes.
- autonomous because they control their own affairs and are active outside the structures of the state
- they make demands and exert influence over the structures of the state
- dissenting vocation, attempt to develop an alternative power base.

Popular education methods are invaluable to the holistic development of social movements. It is a symbiotic relationship, popular movements are strengthened by popular education and vice versa.

Globalisation through resistance

The rise of neo-liberalism as the global hegemonic doctrine has been accompanied by a corresponding rise of resistance to it's policies and their impacts. In the north events such as Seattle (1999), Prague (2000), Genoa (2001) have stolen the headlines as the media focus on spectacular eruptions. Around the world resistance to neo-liberalism happens daily with communities struggling against the takeover of their lands, natural resources and ways of life. Social movements in Latin America for example are very powerful and the Zapatista uprising of 1994 bought the world's attention to the impacts of NAFTA, (the north American free trade agreement). Solidarity with the

autonomous Zapatista communities is one example of the way local and global struggles are interlinked. This movement is often referred to by those that operate within its framework as a movement of movements which reflects its diversity.

'Movement of Movements'

It is difficult to characterise but some distinguishing features are:

- It has no leaders, it is made from the people within
- It has no common goal
- It has no shared political ideology
- It has no headquarters, no permanent staff
- It deals with different issues not just one.
- It aims to build global horizontal networks.
- It has no blueprint for social change
- It does not seek to replicate power structures.
- It has been enabled by the development of the Internet and electronic communication.

Since the 2000 social forums have been springing up across the world, e.g the European Social Forum in London 10/2004. These forums are spaces where many people come together to discuss global and local issues. They are a direct result of the manifestations on the streets.

Being very lowly funded entities it is sometimes difficult for education about these movements to enter in to the public sphere. A growing trend for activist research aims to bring some formal analysis to the study of these processes.

Corporate Takeover of Universities.

"In the new connected knowledge economy, the first war of this century will be a war for human talent" BP's Rodney Chase.

"For us as a university, not to want to do everything we can to serve the (oil and gas) industry would be irresponsible," Principal of Aberdeen University.

Government sponsorship of research and development (R&D) projects carried out in the UK is now focused on achieving industry co-funding. An estimated 50% of the 67 million spent annually on research projects is paid for by the tax payer. BP and Shell are the biggest oil sponsors of academic R&D, Shell alone invests 3.7 million pounds a year in UK universities.

Further Reading

Bigelow N (1994) and Peterson B (2004) Rethinking Globalisation. Rethinking Schools Press. USA.

Freire P (1996) Pedagogy of the Oppressed. London. Penguin

Harvey D (1973) Spaces of Hope. Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Press

Merret C (2000) Teaching Social Justice. Reviving Geographies neglected tradition.

Also see the following websites www.indymedia.org.uk, www.trapeze.org,