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Navigating Education through Hegemonic Smokescreen: Reading the Word and Reading the World

Drawing upon ethnographic insights from youth studies conducted in Canada, Tajikistan and Pakistan as well as optics of critical sociology of globalisation, development and education, the presentation will contrast the 'word' of education (which is being both homogenised and hegemonised) and therefore has become static, with world of education (made up of 'liquid' social/cultural realities of the world) which is in constant flux and 'risk'; and therefore unfinished and in state of becoming.

It will be further argued that the static nature of the 'word' or text of education (the way it has come to be) is result of hegemony of neo-liberal/capitalist and other ideological forces which have used education as an instrument of control and domination of imagination. To explore this further, the presentation will provide critique on how commodification of knowledge and its packaged 'trade' inter-nationally has narrowed down dimensions of knowledge linking educational outcomes with set of set of information and skills which serves market (logic of consumerism). Here it will be argued that neo-liberal capitalist agenda has hijacked enterprise of education, whereby aims of education (uprooted from its classical vision and moorings of: ethics and imagination of developing 'good' humans and society) has been reduced to acquire ideals of consumerism. Such a fractured and constrained role of education is a 'risk' which gets subtly homogenised in a manner that it soon begin to appear as the norm, and thereby popular. Such a conception of education privileges 'functional' and instrumental role of knowledge and reasoning, at the risk of nullifying interpretive and emancipatory capacity of knowledge and learning. Moreover, knowledge as a branded commodity (in international scenario), through instruments of standardization (international assessment industry), marginalises heterogeneity of ways of knowing and being in the world, missing out on important cultural sensitivities and potentials. Thus a situation is created standardisation and homogenisation has become dominating force- which is a big RISK for contemporary societies, and by the same token for education. The result of such domination (economical, ideological, political) is out there evident and depressing.

The project of re-thinking education therefore requires critical awareness of the hegemonic structures which cage 'wings' of education, so that through this awareness strategic transformation can be brought first to the very state of education; which in turn can bring positive transformation in the world. To do so there is a need to what Freire calls 'demythologizing' education, and to reclaim purpose and potential of education to make it the practice of freedom-as opposed to it being the practice of domination. To achieve this, educational vision and stance need to move away from conformity towards creativity and imagination, equipped by thinking-tools of critical pedagogy. It will be advocated that education in order to be responsive to the uncertain world needs to re-imagine society, and develop agency of the learner and community. This requires, privileging and investing in learners and community development rather than the institutions and beurocretic mechanisms (high imbalance in modern development paradigm). Furthermore, educational processes need to be strengthened, and outcomes need to be redefined whereby emphasis and priority should be given to developing: learner's reflexivity, social imagination, capacity to globalise goodness, justice and cosmopolitan inspiration.