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The open society and its continual enemies: The need to re-balance education and develop a more critical attitude to knowledge and accepted practice

“The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society.” *Martin Luther King*

This presentation asks, what prevents us from balancing education between efficiency and criticality?

To address this question, I use Popper’s theory of the Open Society to argue that the problems of our current education system are at least in part due to the construction of knowledge and education favouring a Closed Society. In this Closed Society, knowledge is not exposed to critical analysis, and debate in all but the closest of confines is restricted.

At the root of the Closed Society is Plato’s notion of the Republic, on which so many modern political theories and movements are founded. In this regime, instead of allowing a democratic consciousness to exist –an Open Society – Plato proposed a natural order of society, one in which his own aristocratic political class had a natural, inherent right to rule.

Therefore, it can be said that the Closed Society is one that favors individuals who make decisions, at the expense of those whose rights they are rhetorically defending – often those whose rights they say they are putting over their own. The Open Society, on the other hand, is one in which those who make decisions put the rights of those they are rhetorically securing ahead of their own, and which is genuinely self-less.

In education, I argue those who develop social norms and the knowledge that we teach in schools and colleges, still exploit what Popper argues are grey areas in belief. Therefore, in the process of developing knowledge for education, this need to regulate has culturally evolved into a need to institutionalize, classify and formalize. Furthermore, the social groupings and classifications that occur are mythologized, and lead to discrimination and social exclusion of children with what are referred to as Special Needs.

In this presentation, I also argue that classification is similarly based on a combination of mythological shared characteristics. These characteristics are defined as per institutional need. These mythological characteristics can also include: biological or social/cultural appearance, behavior, prowess and philosophy.

For example, some Western races and classes have traditionally emphasized physical prowess and strength over perceived intelligence. These are measured by IQ tests, which have artificially classified language and intelligence. Similarly, in the past intelligence and ethics have been linked with the ability to see, hear and speak formal language, and thus participate in education or acts of worship. Consequently, people who are deaf and blind have been thought to be less intelligent and ethical.

In this presentation I conclude, to rebalance our education we must go further than raising our children critically and efficiently. We must criticize our own ontologies and epistemologies, particularly those in our institutions and those of our own human classifications. Thus, in not self-analyzing the rules of our present, we disallow future generations from opening their minds and their societies.