

Generation Z: The Rebirth of Critical Thinkers and Conscious Beings

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According to the government, the educational system in the United States is an instructional establishment designed to present learners with opportunities for the future in which they are able to meet their maximum potential. Although an important facet of American education is to provide equal access, many individuals are subordinated by inadequate learning environments. The educational system creates disparities which compromise the futures of its students. Groups who suffer are predominantly minorities who assume the role of the oppressed. They are burdened with the misfortune of learning how to be obedient in a wrongfully disciplined environment, instead of being enlightened and effectively transformed. These structures of power facilitate the imprisonment of minorities by establishing and maintaining fear, while assembling a system of economic tracking in order to further exploit students. Education is a vicious cycle: it serves to be an inept dictatorial environment. However, if students and teachers were able to mutually become conscious beings, education would become a liberating structure focusing on authentic thought. This paper examines education as a source of oppression and liberation in order to discuss why oppression has led to the criminalization of multiple generations. Liberation can only be fully attained if individuals can acquire authentic liberation as well as serve as a catalyst to produce other conscious beings.

America's educational system divides its students into two opposite extremes of rich and poor, which causes the criminalization of multiple generations. Criminalization is seen specifically in poor parts of the nation, where teachers demonstrate power and control to restore order. Schools are corrupted by "faultless communication" through which teachers display authority in order to ingrain into their students' minds that they need to be obedient in order to succeed: "If you do what I tell you to do, how I tell you to do it and when I tell you to do it, you'll get it right" (Kozel 2). This means of discipline "embrace[s] the pedagogy of direct command and absolute control," which is a "proponent of scripted role-and-drill curricula [that] articulate[s] its aim as the establishment of "faultless communication" between "the teacher, who is the stimulus [and] the students who respond" (4). This theory of teaching in order to produce obedience starts from a young age, thus teaching children how to become inferior as individuals in society. This pedagogy is comprised of militarized language and hand signals utilized in classrooms which display a "model of industrialized efficiency". Protocols and rules that dominate the educational system make students inferior. Thus, these "Skinnerian instructional approaches...decapitate a child's capability for critical reflection" designing a zero noise, zero tolerance atmosphere that, in turn, gives rise to the criminalization of youth and to a culture of silence (7).

Silence generates students who are internally oppressed and who correlate obedience with social acceptance, thus wounding their capability to effectively examine different facets of the world in which they live in. The capacity for excellence lies at the heart of unquestioning students who define a "culture of silence" that breeds obedience. Students who remain silent render themselves powerless. Therefore, in a student's continual attempt to constantly generate the "right answer" they diminish their ability to independently examine and fully form their own opinions about previous claims regarding the subject they are learning about. Thus, students are subconsciously living in constant fear and silence and are internally oppressed because they are

surrounded by a structure that “does not consistently encourage the development of...natural intelligence”, but instead “forces students to comply with a form of instruction that is severely limiting” (Osajima 27). These students are no longer individuals desiring self-acceptance, but instead, yearn for the acceptance from a dominant group in order to feel more self-worth because “at a certain point...the oppressed feel an irresistible attraction toward the oppressor and his [or her] way of life” (27). This obsessive nature eliminates the students’ ability to critically examine the world they are surrounded by and reduces critical thinking and therefore his/her potential to question modes of examination and manipulation in action.

An in-depth analysis of our problematic educational system has caused liberated individuals to reinvent several teaching approaches. These new approaches have strived to give students the opportunity to form critical perspectives as a new mode of interpretation. However, after discussing the complexities of the student-teacher relationship, Keith Osajima expresses that, similar to other minority groups, Asian-Americans are subject to an almost identical type of “Taylorism”. This Taylorism enforces the regulation of a zero noise, zero tolerance policy. After Osajima realizes that “for many Asian-American students, silence and education lie at the heart of how we [,as an repressed generation] have dealt with racial oppression”, he proposes the idea that teachers should create a learning environment that “make[s] it safe for students to... take risks and critically examine their lives in relation to societal oppressions,” (Osajima 28). Consequently, through allowing the student to evaluate the impact that social constraints and pressures have on him/her, the teacher can reevaluate his/her teaching methods through a lens that will and should remain free of judgment. Osajima proposes a solution of giving students an allotted time in order to gauge the general concept of each lecture and later discuss the material through participation. These techniques represent “hope that the educational process can do more than just produce a compliant workforce, but can be a vehicle for liberation” for both students and teachers (28).

Liberation is the act of freeing someone from oppression in order for humanization to be fully attained. Liberation calls for the practice of men and women reflecting “upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 19). Thus, those attempting to liberate others, while being liberated must no longer identify with the role of a trainer or a trainee, but as a “conscious being” committed to the acknowledgement of education, not as a system of transferring, but as a separate entity of insight. This simultaneous act of liberation demonstrates a consciousness represented by both the student and the teacher that can then allow for the purpose of education to be fulfilled, giving each individual the capability to make decisions for himself/herself. Therefore, “no one can be authentically human while he [/she] prevents others from being so” because if the student-teacher contradiction is not resolved then authenticity is unattainable. The ability to break from the confines of injustice, “undermine the power of oppression”, and develop an experimental conscience will “resolve the student-teacher contradiction... [and] serve the cause of liberation” (Freire, 17). Thus, when liberation is in the process of being fully acquired, he/she may find themselves “at [a] point [where they] begin to develop a conscience, [and therefore,] must find [him/herself] at war with society....[now that] it is [their] responsibility to change society if [he/she] think[s] of [themselves] as an educated person” (Baldwin, 12). Students and teachers can be properly emancipated from these virtual bars of imprisonment that have slowly diminished their innate ability to be critical thinkers, if, and only if a new schema is developed with the awareness of societal issues that desire contemporary problem-solving techniques.

Although education is the source of both oppression and liberation, oppression is comprised of imprisoned individuals who serve as a catalyst for generating an oppressed people. Whereas, liberation stems from the breaking of a psychological schema in order to redefine and renovate detrimental institutional structures currently established. This is a type of re-creation envisions a society consisting of conscience beings. However, both cannot coexist within a system of education where “invention and re-invention” establishes the creation of knowledge (Freire, 16). Oppression in an educational system hinders both the student’s and teacher’s ability to focus on reaching his/her maximum potential, due to the detrimental effects of factory-like approaches that strategically inflict inferiority upon the student-teacher relationship. It consists of “faultless communication” and militarized language which teaches students how to become obedient in order for them to comply with what is identified as socially acceptable. A production of compliant students renders them as weak individuals in an educational system capitalized by dictatorship. However, some educators have been able to recognize the misfortune that both students and teachers have been subjected too. They have been able to reach an authentic state of consciousness, in order to solve issues seen within a destructive educational system. By choice, they teach the oppressed how to break from the confines of a dehumanizing state in order for others to attain authentic liberation. Ultimately, through the process of humanization, a generation of “conscious beings” and critical thinkers will be reborn with the objective to revolutionize many other educational systems in place- in order for themselves, as well as others, to somehow become more fully human.