

SECOND CARNEGIE INQUIRY INTO POVERTY  
AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Education for Justice

by

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How can the Doors of Learning and Culture be Open to All?

The Freedom Charter defines the goal of a just education system in this way:

"THE DOORS OF LEARNING AND CULTURE SHALL BE OPENED TO ALL."

The aim of this paper will be to look at each part of that aim:

-- the doors of learning

How are we to define the "doors of learning" in 1984?

-- Shall be opened.

How?

-- To all.

How can that "all" be as inclusive as possible?

My analysis will draw heavily on two of the most important writers on education this century has produced — Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire.

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THE DOORS OF LEARNING:

No doubt, those who participated in the Congress of the People in 1955 and formulated the Freedom Charter, had in mind, when they formulated the goal — "The doors of learning shall be opened to all" — that people of all races should be free to attend any school, technical college or university on merit.

In addition, they called for "state allowances and scholarships" to make this possible at the tertiary level and stated that "Adult illiteracy (should be ended) by a mass state education plan."

As we look at the goal they set, twenty nine years later, we have to take account of the vast amount of thinking which has been done about education since the fifties.

ILICH'S CRITICISM OF SCHOOLING:

In particular we need to take account of the widespread criticism of schooling, most tellingly expressed in Ivan Illich's Deschooling Society.

Time will allow me only to summarize the main ones:

1. Illich claims that schooling is too expensive to provide equally for all, even in the richest countries.
2. Schooling stupefies people and makes them passive consumers, dependant on teachers and instructors. One needs only to compare the enthusiasm pre-school children show for learning with the attitude of the average matriculant.
3. Schooling neglects resources which could be used to encourage learning. The very existence of schooling proclaims that the only significant learning takes place in school - under the direction of a teacher. If we think of our own experience we will realize that most learning takes place outside the classroom. Schooling, however, teaches us to distrust such learning.
4. Schooling creates a monopoly over the state finances available for the promotion of learning. Very little or no money is available to promote other ways of learning, and at other stages of life than the age-span 6-16.
5. Illich decries the 'hidden curriculum' of schooling. Whatever the 'overt curriculum' might be, everyone learns from the very existence of school - even those who don't have the opportunity to attend, or who drop out after a few years. They come to accept that they haven't done better in life because they didn't progress far enough in schooling. Thus they interiorize their failure, blaming themselves rather than the school system or their poverty. In the process their inferior position is legitimated.
6. The schooling system discriminates against those who have acquired skills and knowledge in other ways than by attending school. Even though they might be able to prove their competence to do a certain job, they cannot compete against those who have school certificates.
7. Schooling is a highly inefficient method of learning based on very inadequate motivation and experience. There is research which demonstrates that adults can learn in a space of a few weeks or months all that is learnt in 12 years of schooling. The reason is that they are highly motivated because they can see some immediate benefit.
8. Schooling, says Illich, operates as a 'regressive method' of taxation. All pay taxes for schools but the rich benefit most because their children go furthest in the system. We are very familiar with the statistics indicating the gross inequality between the spending on the education of black children and white children. Perhaps we should sometimes question the vast differences between state spending on those who only receive a few years of schooling (or none at all) and those who go as far as university. How can we justify these unequal expenditures?

9. Schooling and education have become commodities, things that people would like to 'have' or own in order that they can acquire jobs, wealth and status. Illich favours the term 'learning' because it suggests an activity on the part of the learner.

He would be pleased that the word 'learning' was chosen for the 'Freedom Charter'. A simple comparison will show what is meant by saying that education has become a commodity. It used to be customary to say that a person was going to a certain university in order "to read" History, English etc. suggesting strongly an activity on the part of the student. Now we're more likely to say that a person has gone to University in order "to get an education", which makes it sound like a neatly wrapped up parcel rather than an activity.

#### FREIRE'S VIEWS ON EDUCATION

Freire is equally strong in his condemnation of education seen as a commodity. He draws a distinction between 'domesticating' and 'liberating' education. The aim of 'domesticating' education is to dominate the learner and to maintain the status quo.

Those who practise 'domesticating' education see education as a transferral of knowledge (like pouring from a full jug into a number of empty glasses). They perceive knowledge as static. Teachers are those who have knowledge they would say - pupils are those who don't. Education is a process of transferring knowledge from those who know to those who don't know.

A friend of mine recently did some research in a local black teachers' training college and was appalled to get answers like the following:

"The duty of the teacher is to impart knowledge as the mind of a child is like a blank page to be filled in".

and

"He (the teacher) must always know more than the pupil".

and

"The subject matter is what the teacher communicates with the child and thus he must know it".

Of course, one really shouldn't be surprised, because the dominant theory of education in all the Afrikaans Universities, and all Black teacher training institutions is "fundamental pedagogics" - a theory which fits in very well with education for domestication. What are students to make of such gobbledygook as the following:

"Fundamental pedagogics has demonstrated that, by means of revealed and ordered lesson course essentials, the transition can be made to the actualisation of a life perspective, which education in its deepest being actually is".

Rote learning would be the only way of coping with a statement like the following:

"That the school is indubitably a necessary place for the realisation of life-perspectival, animating educative teaching of life principles, is, in the same way obvious".

#### LIBERATING EDUCATION:

By contrast, the aim of liberating education is to transform society. Those who hold this theory do not see education as a transferral of knowledge but as an act of knowing. Knowledge is not a fact or a thing, they would say, but a dynamic process which is impossible to transfer but which can be shared. It flows from reflection on action and experience. Hence the act of education is a dialogue between teachers and pupils who jointly seek after truth. Because it is a dialogue and a joint search, the roles of teacher and pupil must be reversible.

#### ILLICH'S VIEW OF LEARNING:

If Illich is so critical of schooling how does he see learning taking place.

"Learning is the human activity which least needs manipulation by others. Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting".

This is how the young child learns before going to school. This is how children learnt in the traditional tribal system of education where there were no schools and children learnt by observation of adults at work, by sharing in that work, and by exercising real responsibility on behalf of the tribe.

Modern society and modern work places are of course far too complicated and even dangerous you may say for children to learn from directly. This is what the noted American philosopher, John Dewey, noted at the beginning of this century. Dewey would strongly support Illich's statement that "learning is the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting". Dewey would however say that the 'meaningful setting' would have to be artificially created in the schools. There the processes of society and its institutions would have to be recreated in miniature and less complicated form, so that children would be able to participate and understand. Dewey's theory and the schools he established were admirable because they were based on the idea of learning as a very active and participating process. But Illich would say - how wasteful to try to reproduce the processes of society, all the aspects of culture, in miniature in the schools. Such a system would inevitably be so expensive that only some would be able to go to school. A just society could never be established in this way.

We come back to the Freedom Charter - "the doors of learning and of culture shall be opened". It's clear that for Illich and Freire the 'doors of learning' does not simply mean schools, colleges and universities. Given the right circumstance just about anything could be seen as a door of learning which needs to be opened i.e. a place from which one could learn, given the correct circumstances.

How can the 'doors of learning' 'be opened'?

The difficulty about learning directly from the world, rather than having information about the world funnelled through teachers and schools, is that opportunities for learning have been increasingly 'designed out of the world'.

Think, for example, of the idea of 'planned obsolescence'. Illich gives the example of a group of fishermen in a coastal area of South America who were earning their living by fishing from small boats powered by outboard motors. He discovered that half the outboard motors purchased before 1950 were still in use at the time of the survey and half those purchased since 1965 were useless. The reason was not hard to find. The design of the earlier models was transparent - people could learn how to repair these models by trial and error. The newer motors are designed in such a way that they can't be repaired - they must be thrown away. This is just one example of how a 'door of learning' can be either opened or shut. There's no point in trying to pack more and more children into formal schools while we allow a mystifying and paralysing technology to develop unchecked.

Illich speaks of four distinct channels of learning that need to be opened and claims that these could contain all the resources needed for real learning. The child grows up, he says, in a world of (1) things, surrounded by people who act as models for (2) skills and values. (3) Peers challenge him/her to argue, compete, co-operate. The lucky child is also exposed to confrontation or criticism by an experienced person (Illich calls an (4) elder) who really cares.

From these four channels, Illich develops suggestions of various forms of network and catalogues of learning opportunities. One type of catalogue could list places like libraries, museums, laboratories, factories, airports, etc. and indicate on what basis they would be accessible.

A second type of catalogue could give lists of skills - indicating on what basis people are willing to share their skills, and giving their addresses.

A third type of catalogue could enable people to describe the learning activity in which they wish to engage in the hope of finding a partner.

A fourth type of catalogue could list professionals who could act as guides to learning.

Illich sees the library or resource centre as the ideal learning institution?

1. because it simply opens the doors of learning.
2. because nobody is compelled to use it, or excluded from its use.
3. the user is not shaped by his/her use.
4. no curriculum is imposed, or series of classes.
5. no one can perceive himself/herself as a failure simply because of its existence. Even the illiterate can make use of its tapes, slides, charts, pictures and records.
6. people can use it according to their need and at their own pace, not in groups moving in lock step.
7. there is no age group which need be excluded from its use.

It's interesting to note that the Freedom Charter states:

"All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands".

OPENED TO ALL:

Which brings me to the final two words of the Freedom Charter statement on education - "to all". What did the Kliptown delegates have in mind? I imagine they were thinking about the removal of all barriers of language, race, class, creed which might prevent people from attending schools, colleges, or universities.

If we recall some of Illich's criticisms of schooling, and if we accept the validity of those criticisms, then we need to go much further than simply ensuring that no-one can be prevented from attending schools, colleges, or universities.

The "doors of learning and culture" will never be opened to all -

1. if we restrict the meaning of "doors of learning and culture" to the schooling system - it's far too expensive.
2. if school buildings can only be used by school pupils, and then only during the day on weekdays - and not by the community generally.
3. if, in practice, education can only take place between the ages of 6 and 16 and to all others, the "doors of learning" at a school level are effectively shut.
4. if we put all our efforts into getting everyone into school, while we know that most learning takes place outside the school system.



WHAT CAN WE DO?

Freire and Illich's criticisms are so sweeping and deep that you may all feel you should immediately drop out of being a student, teacher or lecturer. I don't want to comment on what whether that might be the correct solution. What I would like to do is to examine two models which may give us some idea of how to bring about a more just educational system. I need to stress however that the struggle for a just educational system cannot be separated from other community and worker struggles. In fact, it will only be successful if closely integrated with those struggles.

SCHOOLS BOYCOTTS

I would like to recommend that you try to find out whatever you can about the protracted schools' boycotts of 1976 and 1980. Many pupils commented at the time:

"I learnt more during the boycott than in all my previous years at school".

Teachers and parents commented on how much their children had matured during this time, gaining in self-awareness, in awareness of their power and its limitations, and in a new understanding of their society and how it works. All this they learnt as they reflected on the courageous action they had undertaken and how it was responded to by the State and others. What lesson in politics could ever hope to match the awareness that must have come to the 10 000 students who marched in protest on June 16, 1976 and were confronted by the guns of the State?

What were these students doing during the weeks and months they were on boycott? There were certainly some who were wasting their time, but many spent the time very profitably. I'd like to tell you about the activities of pupils at one high school on the Cape Flats.

They involved themselves in an "awareness" programme which fortunately had the support and involvement of staff members, and which had begun before the boycott as a "subject" on the school timetable.

1. Much attention was given to human rights - and an indepth study was made of the UN Declaration.
2. The pupils studied a booklet entitled "Your legal rights" and then carried out mock arrests, searches, raids, etc. which gave them practice in applying what they had learnt. In fact, throughout the boycott, much use was made of role play.
3. Visits were paid to the local Magistrates Court where pupils listened to cases, especially Pass Law cases. They then reenacted what they had seen at the Court and discussed the deeper issues involved.

4. One of the staff members had contacts in a nearby squatter camp, so he took the pupils in combi-loads to meet the squatters and discuss with them their situation.
5. An urban survey was conducted by groups of students who went into the local community to get information about standards of housing and services. This information was pooled and discussed.
6. The pupils drew up a Manifesto entitled "Education for Liberation" which declared that education should meet the pressing needs of the community. This document was then printed on school letterhead and circulated to other schools for their comments.
7. One class produced a class newspaper, summarizing the events and experiences during the seven weeks of boycott. In the process of producing this newspaper, pupils gained writing experience, they learnt how to interview, they learnt some of the principles of layout and design and also some financial expertise. What they produced was subjected to very rigorous criticism by the other classes - now they were able to see precisely what is meant by bias and distortion. They had been present at all the events described.
8. Finally, they filled in evaluation questionnaires to discover what had been useful in the awareness programme, how actively had people participated, and how could the programme be improved.

I believe that in Soweto, during 1976 and 1977 there was a tremendous flowering of learning. But not about the subjects on the curriculum. The interest was focussed on politics and ideologies - information about which the students had been starved. Books on these subjects were avidly passed from group to group and intensely discussed.

What is highly significant about these two examples of boycott activities is that the pupils were strongly motivated to take part because they were learning exactly what they wanted to learn and what was entirely lacking from the school curriculum. Most of what formed the basis for the "awareness" programme could be done in many schools, provided N.E.U.S.A. would be willing to stand in solidarity with any teachers who might be victimized because of their participation.

#### LINKING EDUCATION WITH PRODUCTION

Let me now turn to the second model which may point the way to the future.

In various parts of the world efforts are being made to link education with productive work. The motivation for this is as follows:

- it is the only way to overcome elitism.
- it may be the only way to make learning opportunities available for all i.e. financially viable.

- it brings back experience and motivation into the educational process.
- if education is a process of reflection upon action, there must be action on which to reflect.
- it breaks down the dichotomy between education and society, students and workers, teachers and pupils, and mental and manual work.

The "Foundation for Education with Production" argues for linking education with production in this way:

"In a period of rapid technological change and economic crisis, education helps to keep people ignorant and passive by compartmentalizing knowledge, and divorcing technical and scientific concepts from their social consequences".

The most notable Southern African example of linking education with production are the 'Brigade Schools' of Botswana. In 1981 there were 30 Brigades at 12 centres, with a total of 11 000 trainees. Members of the Brigades are trained in a whole series of skills: carpentry, plumbing, forestry, leather-tanning, etc., spending about 60% of their time acquiring these skills, and the remaining 40% on formal classroom instruction in subjects like Maths, Science, English, Development Studies and Cultural Studies. The closest integration is attempted between the skill training and the formal classroom subjects e.g. the administration of Brigades requires ability to write letters in English, ability to read catalogues, to complete forms, to order materials, send telegrams and write minutes. In addition, time is devoted to critical reflection on the work experience and all the questions arising from that experience.

Another motivating factor is that members of Brigades are involved in paid work from as early as possible in their training.

Many theorists are very sceptical about whether schools can change society. They claim that societies change schools - not vice versa. Illich is particularly scathing: "School", he says, "is the advertising agency which tells you you need the society as it is".

He also sees school as the place where future citizens learn to passively accept instructions so that they later adjust with little difficulty to the political status quo. And this, he says, holds true whether the school is in a socialist, capitalist or communist society.

Hence Illich is left with no option other than to call for the deschooling of society. But Van Rensburg, the founder of the Botswana Brigades, holds that the only way out is to link education and schooling with productive activity.

Through this link and through subjects like Development Studies (which, incidentally, sounds similar in some ways to the awareness programme of the Cape Flats school described earlier) Van Rensburg seems to have been able to design an educational system which gets to grips with some of Illich's main criticisms of schooling, and to provide an education whose goal is very clearly transformation and liberation. It is probably the most significant attempt yet made in Southern Africa to ensure that the doors of learning shall be opened to all.

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