

PEDAGOGY AND INSTITUTIONAL VALUES: THE SOCIAL CAPITAL THAT UNDERPINS SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTIVIST PEDAGOGY AND THE COMMON GOOD

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ABSTRACT

The analysis of Syed Hussein Alatas, provides us with a basic framework from which to engage the way creativity and change can be articulated in education without slipping into a neo-colonial mindset. The core binary that Alatas presents us is between the 'captive' mind and the 'creative' mind. Contemporary Malaysian educational literature recognises that the demands of the knowledge economy and globalization necessitate engaging with socially constructivist pedagogy as a way of addressing the limitations and narrowness of what are referred to as traditional authoritarian 'top down' teaching methods. However this retheorization of pedagogical practice needs to be approached in a fashion that recognises and respects local values and culture. The social values and capital that inform pedagogy both in its formal level as officially sanctioned techniques but also in its informal level as the implicit practices that characterise human interaction on campus require a much closer look at the relationship between pedagogy, social structure and social values. The clear yet very deep insight of Syed Hussein Alatas, on the importance of the creative mind as an alternative to captivity provides us with a Malaysian theorization that is both local but also global and relevant to how we understand reform and education in the higher education sector.

KEYWORDS

Social capital, Pedagogy, Social Constructivism, Hegemony, Ideology

*Prospero, you are the master of illusion.
Lying is your trademark.
And you have lied so much to me
(lied about the world, lied about me)
that you have ended by imposing on me
an image of myself.
Underdeveloped, you brand me, inferior,
That is the way you have forced me to see myself
I detest that image! What's more, it's a lie!
But now I know you, you old cancer,
and I know myself as well.*

Aime Cesaire, Une Tempete

INTRODUCTION

Reform in the Malaysian university education is occurring at both the social/institutional structural level and at the level of day to day pedagogy. This paper seeks to engage theoretically with several propositions. These propositions manifest in separate but interrelated binaries. The overarching theoretical schema that implicitly informs our analysis of all three binaries is the foundational insight of Syed Hussein Alatas and the critique of the 'captive mind'. The binaries or theoretical problems are as follows:

1. How to ensure that the pedagogical and educational methods in Malaysian education are coherent with and informed by the social and ethical values of the broader society. This is a broad binary. The key animating theoretical influence on understanding this binary is found in the work of Syed Hussein Alatas and his distinction between a captive mind and a creative mind, and the issues of cultural respect and recognition.
2. Given the move towards the knowledge economy/society and the need to change educational method and understandings concomitant to this, we find that our discussion of how to avoid educating for a captive mind requires us to understand the choice we face in progressive pedagogy. This problem manifests in the way in which socially constructivist pedagogy is articulated either as expressivity and individualism or as social and dialogical. The key animating theoretical issue in this binary is the problem of avoiding a simplistic and overly individualistic interpretation of constructivist educational method which manifests both as contrary to the social values of the society and produces individuals who possess no sense of social solidarity, and who are inculcated with neo-liberal, possessively individualistic values. They possess the 'captive minds' of the neo liberal hegemony. The key animating thinkers in this debate are Syed Hussein Alatas whose fundamental insight provides us with a structural template found in binary one and Paulo Friere, who provides us with a specific educational theorization.
3. The problem of how to ensure that the values of the surrounding educational institutional social world are not utterly at odds with the values of the classroom. This manifests as tension between the values taught in the classroom and the values which are 'taught' to students in their observations of how teachers, administrators and others actually operate in the university. The key animating theoretical issue with this binary is the issue of institutional values coherence and the way in which the social interrelations in institutions can undermine the lessons taught in a classroom. The critical theory informing this is the theory of social capital and the key thinkers in this are James Coleman (Coleman, 1990a; Coleman, 1990b; Coleman et al., 1966), Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1983), as well as Syed Hussein Alatas (Alatas, 1975).

THE 'CAPTIVE MIND'

From a general vantage point Syed Hussein Alatas provides us with a classical way to engage the problem of pedagogy, social development and understand the choices we face. The core binary that Alatas presents us is between the 'captive' mind and the 'creative' mind (Alatas, 1974). The idea of the captive mind made famous by Czeslaw Milosz in his critique of Stalinist societies was given depth and situated Malaysian cultural exposition by the work of Syed Hussein Alatas. This binary which is itself representative of a very deep and profound distinction, is of central importance to understanding the distinctions and issues we face in analysing education and social reform. According to Alatas:

- 'A captive mind is the product of higher institutions, of learning, either at home or abroad, whose way of thinking is dominated by Western thought in an imitative and uncritical manner.'
- 'A captive mind is uncreative and incapable of raising original problems.'
- 'It is incapable of devising an analytical method independent of current stereotypes.'
- 'It is incapable of separating the particular from the universal in science and thereby properly adapting the universally valid corpus of scientific knowledge to the particular local situations.'
- 'It is fragmented in outlook.'
- 'It is alienated from the major issues of society.'
- 'It is alienated from its own national tradition, if it exists, in the field of its intellectual pursuit.'
- 'It is unconscious of: its own captivity and the, conditioning factors making it what it is.'
- 'It is not amenable to an adequate quantitative analysis but it can be studied by empirical observation.'
- 'It is a result of the Western dominance over the rest of the world.' (Alatas, 1974)

Alatas in some of his seminal essays on this topic argues that a profound problem that manifests in Malaysian education and indeed in Malaysian higher education is the problem of 'intellectual imperialism'. Intellectual imperialism is a manifestation of what Alatas refers to as 'Erring Modernization' (Alatas, 1975). Erring Modernization is a form of modernization that is reducible to westernization and imperialism, and should be distinguished from modernization that respects and engaged local culture. Erring modernization entails cultural and intellectual imperialism. In many respects Alatas work anticipates and presages the kinds of arguments made by scholars such as Philipson and Pennycook in their critiques of linguistic imperialism (Canagarajah, 1999; Cleary, 1996; Fernández, 2005; Ives, 2006; Merrouche, 2006; Pennycook, 1994; Pennycook, 1995; Pennycook, 1998; Pennycook, 2000a; Pennycook, 2000b; Phillipson, 2009; Tomlinson, 1997) as well as the work of Freire in his critique of 'banking education' (Freire, 1972b).

According to Alatas, intellectual imperialism stifles creativity (Alatas, 1974; Alatas, 1975). Intellectual imperialism, the uncritical acceptance of concepts and ideas from the imperial centre, without localization, without attenuating it to local needs of considering local cultural context leads not to development, nor does it lead to creative educational growth. Rather it leads to the opposite, captivity of the mind and ultimately second rate status. The lack of recognition and dignity that attends such an approach to ideas in education is a characteristic of the unequal indeed asymmetrical inequality that permeates not simply economic forms of interaction but also pedagogical ones as well. Imitation is not the sign of creativity. Alatas writes:

'We should assimilate as much as possible from all sources, from all parts of the world, all useful knowledge. But we need to do this with an independent critical spirit, without turning our backs on our own intellectual heritage. The phenomenon of servility and intellectual bondage are not the same as genuine creative assimilation from abroad.' (Alatas)

The radical reworking by Alatas of the concept of imperialism as it relates to the hegemony of ideas (reminding us strongly of Gramsci) within the framework of the tension between captivity and creativity provides us not simply with an anti-imperialist theorization but also with a way to bridge critiques of imperialism with critiques of pedagogy and learning (Alatas, 1972). In this sense Alatas' theorization of the captive mind coheres with critiques of colonialism found in thinkers such as Memmi (1965) and Césaire (2000), as well as critiques of the decolonization of knowledge by thinkers such as Fanon (Fanon, 2004), and critiques of pedagogy (as mentioned above), found in authors as far ranging as Freire (1972b) and Illich (1976).

The critique of Eurocentrism and Orientalism which animates the work of diverse thinkers from Samir Amin (1979) through to Edward Said (2002), also finds expression in the theorization of Alatas (it is no accident that Said famously recognised Alatas' contribution to the critique of orientalism and imperialism) (Said, 2002). Recognising Alatas' insight on these issues is central to beginning to unravel how we can engage educational reform, and growth within the knowledge economy and current globalization (Alatas, 2003; Carnoy, 1977). In other words Alatas provides us with an excellent and insightful argument into the way imperialism manifests as intellectual hegemony, and how this coheres with intellectual subjugation. Such a theory is invaluable in our current debates over the knowledge economy, learning and the way Malaysia (and indeed many other nations) can engage globalization and educational reform.

CREATIVE OR CAPTIVE PEDAGOGY

The problems of how to engage modernization in Malaysian education are captured and articulated in contemporary Malaysian government policy. The Ninth Malaysian Plan specifically seeks to address student under achievement and to set course for innovation in education and schooling in Malaysia. The Ninth Plan specifically outlines the necessity and objective of developing 'creativity as well as analytical and problem-solving skills' in students (2006). A critical issue is to what extent creativity can cohere with cultural recognition and respect. Malaysia's Knowledge Based Economy Master Plan outlines some of the basic issues squarely:

'The dictates of the environment characterised largely by technological advancements, greater market integration and globalisation, heightened competition as well as the increasing creation and use of knowledge, necessitate a paradigm shift and that Malaysia reengineers herself to meet these challenges.' (ISIS, 2002)

The aims of educational reform as outlined in the Ninth Malaysian Plan and the rationale for this reform as extrapolated in the Knowledge Economy Master Plan, (among many other government plans and position papers), are reinforced in the National Higher Education Action Plan and the release of the Higher Education Strategic Action Plan. These aims are designed to advance Malaysia educationally and build upon its strengths. The Strategic Action plan argues:

'To foster greater national unity, courses focusing on inter-cultural understanding and diversity will be encouraged for all students. However, the mode of presentation shall utilise an affective rather than a cognitive approach – teaching and learning of the subject will be conducted by way of team discussion and participation. In addition, students will participate in compulsory co-curriculum activities such as community services and sports to foster the development of leadership, teamwork and other personal and inter-personal qualities' (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007).

There is recognition that Malaysia must engage the contemporary problems of the knowledge economy and society. There is recognition that Malaysia must engage the issue of creativity and innovation in education. This recognition makes the arguments put forward by Alatas more not less prescient in the contemporary debate. Why is this the case? One reason that it is the case is because working towards innovation and creativity necessitates engaging the issue of pedagogy and educational method as well as culture and values. Contemporary Malaysian educational literature recognises that the demands of the knowledge economy and globalization necessitate engaging with socially constructivist pedagogy as a way of addressing the limitations and narrowness of what are referred to as traditional authoritarian 'top down' teaching methods.

However this retheorization of pedagogical practice needs to be approached in a fashion that recognises and respects local values and culture. How social constructivist pedagogy is taken up is of critical importance. In the Malaysian context, according to many critics, the practices of traditional pedagogy and so-called rote learning characterize Malaysian schooling and teaching. According to Yen et al., 'a great number of Malaysian students are actually passive learners and spoon-fed learners, who rely heavily on rote learning' (Ng et al., 2005). Critical Malaysian educational literature recognises the current problems of rote learning as educational method. (Kent, 2006; Mustapha, 1998; Hussin, 2006; Mustapha, 2001; Zakaria and Iksan, 2007; Idrus, 2007; Ismail, 2005).

Nonetheless it is important to avoid slipping into a kind of pejorative binary between local practices ('spoon fed') and more progressive practices (usually seen as western). Malaysian educational practices must be understood in a far more nuanced fashion, than found in simple binaries of student or teacher centred pedagogy. Over simplification of the problems and cultural nature of Malaysian instruction and educational method finds easy expression in simplifications and binaries such as 'chalk and talk' or teacher centred versus student centred. However these ways of framing the choices available frame Malaysian education in a way that is culturally over simplified. These binaries are themselves part of a global discourse that suggests universality but in fact are the products of specific cultural ways of understanding pedagogy. Binaries are themselves expressions of discourse, regimes of truth in Foucault's sense. Implicit within such discourses are cultural practices and social relationships that are often implied but rarely understood explicitly.

For example, the difference between an individualistic culture which posits a clear delineation between the individual and society manifests in pedagogical binaries that also reflect this form of socio-cultural framework (teacher centred versus student centred, individual expression versus teacher centred authority). However in a communitarian culture (such as Malaysia's) these simple binaries of the individual against social authority and the corollary of how these binaries inform our understandings of creativity need interrogation. Theorists as far ranging as Philipson (2009), Alatas (1974), Freire (1972b) and Bowers (2001, 2003, 2005), all from diverse perspectives capture the sense in which the simplifications of pedagogical discourse is itself an expression of 'power' and 'hegemony'. The simple binaries, by virtue of their simplicity hide from us the deeper cultural and historical issues at stake in educational reform. Pithiness is no substitute for substantive critique.

The World Bank uses these kinds of over simplified metaphors in their discussions. For example they argue that, 'The "chalk and talk" approach continues to prevail at the primary and secondary levels, with little opportunity for the students to think critically or imaginatively (World Bank, 2007). The question that needs to be raised (though time and space preclude me fully elaborating it in this paper), is to what extent an individualistic neo-liberal ethos informs the way bodies such as the World

Bank and others articulate the range of choices available for Malaysians in education. What if in communitarian culture creativity is formed through social purpose rather than individual expression? Does this then shift how we should understand the basic approach to educational choice? Is there a missing middle in our contemporary discourse that posits the student versus the teacher, the individual versus authority, self expression of the individual versus teacher centred rote learning?

Given the issues articulated above it is important to note that forms of educational technique/method are also productive forms of social interaction. They are in other words forms of cultural and social interaction. The idea that these forms of pedagogical/educational technique are somehow devoid of culture and without political, social and cultural implications is to sell short the significance of educational reform and the importance of educational change to the broader society. There is a critical issue at stake in educational reform. Put simply there is a need to avoid a kind of cargo cult approach to pedagogy. There is a need to avoid uncritically espousing pedagogical reform without engaging it in local practice. In other words, there is a need to avoid practicing the captive mind.

All pedagogical reform should be culturally nuanced and sensitive to the aspirations and temperaments of local culture. In other words, one of the big issues in pedagogical reform in Malaysia is avoiding theorising contemporary Malaysian educational practices as somehow simply a 'deficit'. There is a need to analyse the issues of reform 'inside out' rather than viewing solutions as outside impositions. Contemporary theorizations of this approach this rethinking provides a clear demonstration of the creative and culturally informed method articulated by Alatas in his critique of 'the captive mind' and 'intellectual imperialism'.

Given the need to reform and change Malaysian education the need to compete and develop in the contemporary world; and finally the need to avoid neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism masked as educational reform, what is the way forward? How do we ensure our pedagogy does not produce a captive mind and produces a creative mind? What is the nature of the values that are articulated through our pedagogical method? One of the critical problems with uptake of 'progressive' educational ideas under the rubric of the knowledge economy is the way in which there is little engagement with how to inform and temper and adapt these ideas within a specific cultural context.

The universal aspect of the knowledge society and economy must be disentangled from the culturally specific elements and negative traits that by definition always accompany such transformations. Otherwise under the auspices of engaging creativity and innovation by virtue of the uncritical way we accept theories as if they are without cultural and normative content, we in fact reinforce a kind of captive mind mentality. We formally talk of innovation and growth but we substantively continue a practice of subservience which ultimately leads neither to innovation nor development.

As argued above the adages of neo liberal economic and progressive pedagogical theory are often espoused without adequate recognition of the cultural complexity and problems that characterise host societies. However, the hegemony of neo-liberalism as the dominant ideology and discursive imaginary of globalization also informs how socially constructivist pedagogy (Phillips, 1995; Slezak, 2000) is taken up and articulated in educational institutions. It also influences how we frame the choices we have. As argued above properly understood pedagogy is not simply technique it is a form of praxis. How socially constructivist pedagogy is interpreted and sustained within an institution relies in part on the way ideological hegemony manifests through the values and practices of an educational institution. The

meaning of constructivism is not immune to the social frameworks and discourses within which it is practiced.

In short we need to develop the skills and dispositions necessary to engage the knowledge economy/society, while at the same time enabling through its underlying structure the adaptation to Malaysian values and culture. What then are some of the issues in respect to moving in this direction?

1. The hegemony of neo-liberalism informs how socially constructivist pedagogy (Phillips, 1995; Slezak, 2000) is taken up and expressed in educational institutions. Socially constructivist pedagogy contains within it a critical binary. This binary can be characterized as a tension between constructivist pedagogy as individual self-expression and constructivist pedagogy as dialogical engagement with social values.
2. Properly understood however, pedagogy is not simply technique. The meaning of constructivism is not immune to the social frameworks and discourses within which it is practiced. Pedagogy is a form of social practice. It involves social capital, cultural values and normative values. Understood in this way pedagogical practice within a university are forms of social interaction and expressions of cultural values.
3. The social values and capital that inform pedagogy both in its formal level as officially sanctioned techniques but also in its informal level as the implicit practices that characterise human cultural and ethical interaction require a much closer look at the relationship between pedagogy, and social values. Constructivist pedagogy taught with an overly individualistic orientation in an environment that is infused with neo-liberal values of competition, profit, individualism and competition will tend to reward forms of self-expression by students that are possessive, individualistic and competitive.

INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE REINFORCING OR CHALLENGING CAPTIVITY

Pedagogical reform and social structural reform go hand in hand. Nonetheless, the way these changes interact is problematic. An educational project that articulates universities as simply market driven entities and sees the function and mission of a university within a possessive individualistic frame of reference will, arguably, correspond to a social value system that is individualistic competitive and possessive. If this theoretical articulation of the problem of values social capital and its influence on pedagogy hold true then the problems of successful implementation of collaborative, cooperative and creative pedagogy within universities is not simply a problem of internal classroom technique but rather of the overarching values of the university community. In other words the problems of engaging the creative mind and challenging the captive mind are also problems that are influenced by the coherence of values within educational institutions.

The idea that differing forms of pedagogical engagement taken up in universities is autonomous from the overarching values of the institution is flawed. Marketization in *extremis* undercuts the values that inform progressive and normatively engaged pedagogy: especially socially and dialogically constructivist pedagogy. In other words, pure marketization undercuts the social values of recognition (Taylor and Gutmann, 1992), respect and cultural value realised through proper and balanced social constructivist pedagogy. It instils implicitly through processes of ideological articulation and hegemony the values of the captive mind. A mind that is normatively, disconnected from the ethics and cultural values of the host society and accepts as universally valid cultural values that are in fact specific forms of domination of neo-liberal Westernization.

Neo-liberal (Giroux, 2002; Hill, 2006) market values especially as they are institutionalized in educational practices tend to privilege and cohere with the individualistic expressive and possessive values that characterize one side of the constructivist binary that we analysed above. The problem with this is that the values of cooperation, dialogue and respectful engagement with others tend to be sidelined by the neo-liberal competitive ethos. If they are sidelined in day to day interactions they will be sidelined in the way students accept or reject their validity in the classroom.

The contemporary value systems and ideologies that structure the social capital of higher educational institutions in Malaysia are in fact dynamic and shifting. This is largely as a result of the forces of globalization. With the pressures of privatization, corporatization and consumerization, institutional culture in some educational institutions is now becoming far more influenced by neo-liberal ideological values.

This pressure of privatization and competitive individualism is lamented yet what its relationship is to pedagogy is in conflict. If the way administrators, academics and others actually interact and act in day to day social interactions in educational institutions is increasingly characterised by competitive and individualistic values then all the talk of collaboration in the classroom will become dysfunctional. Forms of social capital that inform the day to day engagements in educational institutions either support or contradict the collaborative and dialogical lessons taught in modern classrooms. In this sense the lessons learned by students are learned both inside and outside of class. A failure to grasp the way that social capital and the lessons of pedagogy are interactive with the broader educational environment is a failure to understand that many of the deepest lessons occur outside of the classroom and either reinforce or negate what occurs inside the classroom.

If the pressures of neo-liberalism help to deconstruct and inhibit the uptake of collaborative and dialogical values in the classroom by dint of the counter example they present to students in 'real life' through their observations of actual institutional practices and social relations, we have at the level of learning problems of tension in how we are modelling to students. We have a problem of coherence of institutional values. A simple thought experiment should suffice to clarify the points made above.

Imagine a student in a classroom being taught collaborative pedagogy, dialogue, mutual respect, and socially constructivist learning. In other words imagine a Vygotskian/Alatasian classroom, where interactive learning, the application of the Zone of Proximal Development, and problem solving collaborative pedagogies are espoused and practiced. Now imagine the student leaving the classroom and walking around the educational institution, where individualism, crass competitive, possessive values and consumer rationality permeated everyday interactions. How seriously will the student take the skills they were taught in the socially constructivist classroom? How much will the lessons learned in such a classroom be unlearned by their observations of the 'reality' of what is rewarded and what is not in schooling?

Consider the analogous situation of contemporary society. How much is what we teach with respect to moral values is undermined by practical observations by students of what is really rewarded in society and what is not? Students are rational beings and they cannot be blamed for drawing logical conclusions about what is truly valued and what is given lip service. A classical metaphor for understanding how important the whole is to the particular in reform is the metaphor of freeway

reform. You cannot just tell one car to change direction if the entire road system is going in the other direction. Accidents will happen! You have to consider the whole system. Therefore several conclusions may be drawn from the above analysis:

1. Social and institutional structure implicitly carries with it values, yet these values are not simply the expression of a simple private/public value system. Rather the values of neo-liberalism permeate both so called private and public institutions and within both types of educational institution reinforce values of possessive individualism, consumer oriented identity and instrumental reasoning. The important point to remember in this theorization is not that private or public universities necessarily carry with them private or public values. Instead both types of university are contending with the pressures of neo-liberalization, globalization and consumerist rationality that attends these forces.
2. Following from these critical points we must view forms of pedagogy as forms of social relations that encompass values and norms which are either reinforced in the generalised values and forms of social capital in an institution or are at odds with it. This essential theoretical proposition is that the centrality of the types of social capital and values in the broader university domain can act to either confer legitimacy or de-legitimise forms of pedagogical social capital and practice within a university. Understanding this point is central to understanding the extent to which the positive values of socially constructivist and dialogically creative pedagogy receive ongoing support within an institution or are at odds with the dominant values of that institution. Simply put, the idea that differing forms of pedagogical engagement taken up in universities are autonomous from the overarching values of the institution is flawed.
3. In this sense not only are the problems of pedagogical competencies, informed by the nature of social capital attributes such as trust, collaboration, dialogue, respect and openness, but also the ability of institutions to teach these things depends in some measure on the way these values and attributes are viewed or reinforced within general institutional culture.

CONCLUSION: THE BINARIES OF EDUCATION

The previous discussion seeks to engage the way pedagogical/educational theory translates in a Malaysian context. How do we ensure that the values of the surrounding social world in educational institutions are not utterly at odds with the values of the classroom, how do we ensure that the specific pedagogical and educational methods in the classroom are coherent Malaysian values and that the broader values of educational institutions cohere with this program? These problems are critical to understand if we are not to fall into a trap of having our educational methods utterly dysfunctional to the needs of the society.

The analysis of Syed Hussein Alatas, provides us with a basic framework from which to engage the way creativity and change can be articulated in education without slipping into a neo-colonial mindset. Educators such as Paulo Freire (1972a, 1976, 1989, 1998) and Lev Vygotsky (2004) provide a fuller articulation at the level of pedagogical method, of socially constructivist pedagogy that is dialogical, and culturally informed, which can temper and inform how we teach. Such thinkers are concerned with linking pedagogy to dialogical method and cultural respect. This presents an alternative to the possessive individualism, which can result from an individualistic pedagogy simply concerned with self expression and individual creativity. Finally, recognising that values are not spatially limited (to a classroom for example), and that how students see us interact in our educational institutions

can inform how they perceive the validity of ideas of social responsibility and non consumerist ethics taught in classrooms, is a simple yet important point.

Ultimately, an education system worth its salt is one that takes seriously the problems of moving away from the problems of a captive mind and engaging creativity and learning in a fashion that is culturally informed. Such an approach to how we perceive what we do is both possible and significant if we want to avoid the problems of neo colonial mindsets. The clear yet very deep insight of Syed Hussein Alatas, on the importance of the creative mind as an alternative to captivity provides us with a Malaysian theorization that is both local but also global.

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