

Outcome-oriented education

Denial of joy, justice, and freedom

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In a transactional model of education, where a teacher delivers and students receive, the assumption is that teaching and learning are objectively unified experiences, and their impacts are instantly measurable. Such an assumption explains why the standardized Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs), a tool that best epitomizes this outcome-oriented approach, have become the common benchmark since the 1960s (Benson and Lewis 1994), despite their many criticisms. Some of these criticisms are around SETs' potential bias against certain demographics, for instance, non-white, non-native speaker, or female faculty, or certain subject matters (ASA 2019). They have also been criticized based on how they could restrict faculty's academic freedom and function, as a means of administrative intrusion into the classroom, or even based on their reliability and validity as statistically accurate tools. SETs, whether reliable, biased, or not, are common elements in faculty's portfolio capable of determining their fate. They are used in annual evaluations, as well as salary and promotion and tenure decisions.

The contents of these evaluations are provided by the other side of the learning process, i.e. students, regarded as customers, who must be kept satisfied. Faculty's academic freedom, thus, in choosing the course content, class interactions and pedagogy, and grading is impacted by their concerns about these evaluations. The precarity that the teachers feel in such a system that views education as a fast-paced knowledge-delivery service industry with a relatively short feedback loop, forcibly turns the collaborative learning process into a petrifying feeling good struggle. As bell hooks writes in *Teaching to Transgress*, what such a mercantilist model of knowledge-delivery does for professors is creating a system where they "want to feel that by the end of the semester every student will be sitting there filling out their evaluations testifying that I'm a "good teacher."" (1994, 153)

This feeling "good" that stems from a sense of insecurity, constant scrutiny, and relentless call from the administration for "continuous improvement", is founded upon the mind-body split that denies true feelings of pain and joy in the process of authentic inquiry as well as collective knowledge production which results in genuine fulfilment rather than success in what Berry et al. call "academic assembly line" (2001, 87). The idea that cognition without agency happens in bounded individuals and away from emotions and community is the continuation and infiltration of an individualistic mindset and structure which removes individuals from their environment and deprives them the potential for a liberatory education which, according to Freire, should happen with people, with the world, and in the world. SETs are the epitome of the quantification in the outcome-based education, where speedy and measurable learning is the benchmark for success. What we teach in social sciences and humanities, as bell hooks writes, could be painful and troubling, and "It may be six months or a year, even two years later, that they [i.e. the students] realize the importance of what they have learned." (hooks 1994, 153) A hard reality which places teachers between a rock and a hard place, where some form of compromise is needed, either at the expense of the students or teachers or both. In either case and ultimately, this compromise will be at the expense of learning.

SETs are indeed a means of forcing teachers to satisfy the customer base whose assessment determines the fate of their teachers. Now, if the topics are hard, and the teachers look for true communication and collective knowledge production, would students appreciate it? There comes the compromise again. Students who have no agency in their educational process, be it selection of materials, pedagogy, or assessment methods, are left with one conduit to guide their power, or lack thereof, and that is end of the semester evaluations. That is where they express their opinion, even sometimes about the class size or the class hours. Teachers have to carry some additional weight here: the weight of institutional dysfunction, inherited from the larger capitalist enterprise. Here, the bias comes into picture again. bell hooks search for "feeling good" of course was impacted by who she was: a female black teacher who taught about feminism and black thought. That is why Freire (2005) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* states that in the banking or transactional model of

education students are not consulted about the content, pedagogy, or assessment of their experience. The teacher narrates and the students passively listen. Conversely, if students and teachers were able to communicate about the class, its aims, content, delivery, evaluation, and if they could have a dialogue about the hopes and restrictions of their experience, they would already have their agency recognized, respected, considered, and exercised.

In a genuine attempt to learn, this agency and dialogue cannot be postponed due to exigency or expediency. In a liberatory education, as Freire puts it, teachers and students are collaborators; teachers are teacher-students and students are student-teachers, a configuration that openly contradicts the contractual model of education with a server and a clientele. In liberatory education even hard topics which can bring full silence to a classroom pave the way for constructing a path forward with genuine joy and authentic responsibility. Students enter the scene as agents to form solidarity, to work through hardship with determination and hope. Embracing long-term fruits of education, as well as collective emotions in the class and the long-standing affects that are the lingering and long-lasting feelings outside the classroom, do not align with an education system that searches for, what Bill Reading (1996, 127) phrases as “the passage from ignorance to enlightenment in a particular time span.” Learning starts before the class begins since students do not enter the class as blank slates or empty containers, and learning continues after the class since processing knowledge requires time to reflect, instantiate, apply, and discern. Time is an integral component of learning and also of mass production of competitive and replaceable economic labor.

Creativity requires time, not haste and stress. As Berg and Seeber (2016) write, we need to slow down to respect authentic learning and reduce the induced stress. Joy needs to replace stress and haste must be replaced with patient inquiry. Joy is not the same as ease. There is nothing easy or comforting about the genocide of Native Americans and their abandonment in reservations. There is nothing soothing about Frederick Douglass’s speech on Fourth of July and appeals to democracy in the most armed nation in the world with the largest war machine in human history. Joy is the deep lingering determination and zeal for discovery; joy is that before-action integrity which true inquiry bestows upon its subject. Slowing down and exploring joy in revelation inspires action and liberation. It fights against fatalism (Khoshnevis 2021). Hence, slowing down is a matter of agency. As Anna Tsing (2012) writes, “slowness is a dream to encourage, not a trait to objectify.” (95) According to Berg and Seeber (2016) slowing down is not a call for a slow-paced retreat from the world, rather it is, as Freire writes, an impatient and restless process of inquiry that results in hope and emancipation. Slowing down to detect, explore, reflect, and act is not a luxury. It is a necessity that the mechanistic model of education cannot afford, and therefore, stigmatizes with its relentless call for improvement and instillation of inadequacy and guilt. Slowing down is not being passive; it is a matter of taking one’s agency back in an alienating system of speedy mass production.

The claim here is not to either deny the necessity for some form of accountability measure (of course why, by who, and how the faculty are evaluated matters) or undermine students’ experience, perception, judgement, and capability to provide useful feedback. To the contrary. It is a genuine call for the retrieval of our abandoned agency. The aim is to remain true to our individual and collective process of fulfillment through exploration and inquiry where joy is directed towards justice and liberation. We need to recognize and truly embrace emotions of fear and despair to move towards joy and agency. Education and learning should be embodied to offset centuries of split between mind and body since students, as true teachers, show that there is barely any separation between how one thinks and how one feels. We need to spend time with these elements of learning to be able to transform the politics of pleasure and its distribution, so we can settle, as suggested by Auroa Levins Morales (2019), where joy meets justice in the intersection of genuine reflection and responsible action.

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