

Chapter # 21

NEED FOR A DEMOCRATIC APPROACH TO SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

This chapter underlies the theory of justice as fairness along with certain capital ideas, such as social and cultural capital. The chapter also highlights the culture of silence and the issue of Western hegemonic discourse. The objective is to look at the connections between the findings collected from five high schools with diverse socioeconomic, cultural and racial backgrounds in South Africa, and the experiences from the work with refugees with a Norway residence permit. The author opts to find similarities between a well-resourced country and a country with an emerging economy. In addition, considering the current refugee problems, it is crucial for the critical examination of the current training and education of refugees in Norway. The research employed a mixed-method research strategy, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study showed that when focusing on social justice, similarities can be found in the two contexts, and this is the focus of the present chapter. The research about the South African education system indicated that the current approach to social justice was limited by a narrow interpretation of the country's present social inequalities, failing to consider the hegemonic nature of Western knowledge in the education system. This chapter argues that the current situation of training and preparation of refugees in Norway shares related limitations and calls for a democratic approach to social justice.

Keywords: social justice, cultural capital, social capital, hegemonic discourse, refugees.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Norwegian government has begun the work on developing a new holistic policy, focusing on adults who have been left behind in the work market. One of the target groups are immigrants with deficient language skills or educational level, or with unacknowledged competence (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2014). This shows that even though Norway is a well-resourced country, some of the inhabitants are struggling to survive and get benefits from the society. Furthermore, the present refugee status indicates an increase in the number of refugees in Norway. Actions need to be taken to assure the basic needs of the refugees and also provide them with a socially just and quality training and education in order to help them become self-sufficient Norwegians. Most of the refugees come from a non-hegemonic knowledge tradition and might face challenges in the Norwegian society, which is based on a Western hegemonic discourse. A previous research conducted by Sønsthagen (2013), looked at similar issues in the South African context. Therefore, the author opts to examine the current introduction programme for refugees in Norway critically as compared to some of the previous findings from the research in South Africa.

A research conducted in South Africa in 2012 examined the extent to which five South African high schools with various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds addressed the issues of social justice, in relation to learners' traditional, cultural, racial and social backgrounds (Sønsthagen, 2013). The approach to social justice was limited by a

narrow interpretation of the country's social inequalities and failure to consider the importance of Western hegemony, and cultural and social capital in the education system (Sønsthagen, 2013).

The differences between the South African high school system and the Norwegian introduction programme for refugees, particularly in relation to the available resources, will play an important role for the findings from South Africa and Norway. However, regardless of these differences, the objective of the present study is to perceive the connection between the two contexts and critically examine the Norwegian context while focusing on social justice. First, the study highlights certain important issues related to both the contexts. Thereafter, the concept of social justice as understood in this chapter is explained together with social positions and Pierre Bourdieu's three forms of capitals. The chapter further examines the importance of hegemonic knowledge, Paulo Freire's "culture of silence", and the methodology of the study before discussing the connections between both the contexts and examining the Norwegian context.

2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

It is claimed that South Africa is one of the unequal countries in the world, with around half of the population living in poverty (Breidlid, 2013). Even though the government in the post-apartheid period has promoted a democratic society redressing past injustices, studies have confirmed that the neoliberal path followed by the government and the post-apartheid period has evidenced a dramatical worsening of inequality within the groups (Marais, 2011). Sefa Dei & Kempf (2006) claimed that the market received primary attention in the democratic period, contributing to the damaging effects on the education system, and reproducing inequalities in the general society (Marais, 2011). Grimaldi (2012, p. 1133) argued that through a neoliberal approach in education, "social justice is defined in the light of a minimal understanding of the concept of equality", ignoring structural factors, by taking a democratic educational approach, and dismissing the role of education as a social good. Thus, a minority of South African learners received quality education, which was distributed through discriminatory class and racial lines (Marais, 2011). The World Economic Forum Report (2014) ranked the quality of South Africa's poor educational system at 146 out of 148 countries.

Norway is both a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy. It is also considered to be a well-resourced country and a welfare-state (Thuesen, 2015). The Norwegian society values equality, non-sexism and non-racism, and freedom of speech. In 2014, around 8800 people got the refugee status and were accepted for a resident permit in Norway. The biggest refugee groups were from Eritrea, Syria, and Somalia (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2014). In 2015, the numbers are likely to increase severely, considering that in October and November alone, over 16500 applied for asylum in Norway (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2015). The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDI) has the responsibility of settling the refugees with a residence permit in different municipalities of Norway. All refugees with a residence permit have the right and duty to attend the two-year introduction programme, and all municipalities that settle refugees are obliged to offer this programme. The aim is to provide basic Norwegian language skills and insight into the Norwegian society, with the goal to prepare the refugees for the workforce or education system. The programme consists of lessons in Norwegian language, social studies, and skills needed for entering the labour market, continuing education and career guidance. While attending the programme, the refugees also receive economic support allocated by the municipality (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet Introduksjonsloven, 2005).

When looking into social justice in education and training, in particular, when the receivers come from a non-hegemonic background and the education and training system is based on a Western hegemonic discourse, the historical theories of Rawls (1971), Bourdieu (1997) and Freire (1970) holds considerable importance.

2.1. Theoretical Background

There are several definitions of social justice, and it is not a straightforward process to define it. Nevertheless, the underlying goal of social justice is to “propose adequate mechanisms used to regulate social arrangements in the fairest way for the benefit of all” (Mncube, 2008, p. 79). Social justice does not entail equal treatment of all individuals in society; it rather indicates that the resources should be distributed in an equitable way. Furthermore, Rawls’s (1971) theory of justice is of absolute importance in understanding this study. He proposed social justice as a fairness-theory that includes two principles. The first is related to basic liberties and rights, and the second is related to the arrangement of social and economic inequalities. These arrangements need not be distributed equally; however, they should be for everyone’s benefit. Rawls (1971) named this as the difference principle. When the difference principle was combined with fair equality of opportunity, the “democratic equality” interpretation of the second principle was eventuated, which is the interpretation used in the present study.

‘Fair equality of opportunity’ should ensure that all individuals are protected against discrimination, and there is an availability of equal educational opportunities for all. According to Grimaldi (2012), the sole focus on equality of opportunity seems to be too narrow. With the inclusion of the difference principle, it becomes a wider and more appropriate approach. The main idea behind such an interpretation is that more attractive prospects for the most advantaged groups in society should not be established or secured unless they are of the advantage to those who are less fortunate (Rawls, 1971). In addition, an individual’s class position should not determine one’s chances of gaining cultural knowledge and skills, thus, “the school system should be designed to even out class barriers” (Rawls, 1971, p. 73).

People are born into different social positions that allocate them to different groups with diverse economic, cultural and social capital. Rawls (1971) stated that individuals are born into different social positions with different expectations in life. In addition to social and economic circumstances, the political system determines these life expectations. In societies with deep inequalities, like that of South Africa, such unequal opportunities and expectations are apparent because of the social position one is born into, which affects one’s initial chances and prospects in life (Marais, 2011; Rawls, 1971). This can be related to Bourdieu’s (1997) theory of capitals. A person’s social goods are dependent on his or her capital, which includes the values, access and resources to the person. Bourdieu (1997) presented capitals in three fundamental ways: economic, cultural, and social capital. The economic capital is directly convertible into money while the cultural capital can be convertible into economic capital under certain conditions. Furthermore, the cultural capital can be gained through education and used for increasing the individual’s economic capital. The social capital can be “made up of social obligations (connections), which are convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of a title of nobility” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 47). Bourdieu (1997) further argued that the educational system constituted of the cultural capital of the dominant group of the society, thus, reproducing advantages and disadvantages.

Habitus is another concept of Bourdieu and “(...) is a way of being which has been inculcated through patterns of behaviour in its history, culture, language and other norms” (Blackledge, 2001, p. 349). It determines how a person sees the world and the way he thinks and acts. This is linked to the education system, and it is argued that the habitus of the dominant group is hegemonic in schools, which “limits the educational opportunities of children from non-dominant groups because the schools demand competence in the dominant language and culture which can only be acquired through family upbringing” (p. 349). Breidlid (2013) connected habitus with the hegemonic ideology in South African schools. Looking at the goals of the introduction programme, one could argue that this system also has a hegemonic ideology (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet Introduksjonsloven, 2005), reproducing “the socio-economic profile and value system of the nation” (Breidlid, 2013, p.107).

Several authors have written about the Western hegemonic discourse (Breidlid, 2013; Sefa Dei & Kempf, 2006). At present, the exclusion and othering of traditional knowledge systems of indigenous African people, in particular, seem to be relevant both in the South African context with a majority of African people and in the Norwegian context where the majority of refugees come from African countries. Even though the majority in South Africa came from an African background, the knowledge production and epistemology that the schools seemed to value the most have been westernised (Breidlid, 2013; Sønsthagen, 2013). Considering that Norway is a Western country, it is natural for the hegemonic discourse to be westernised. According to Ntuli (2002), the Western thought is built on a philosophy of division and control, where hierarchies of values govern the world. In addition, the West is also seen as a power system that emphasises modern science, modern medicine and key concepts, such as individuality, rationality, and progress, over the traditional knowledge systems (Breidlid, 2013). Several educational researchers from both Western and Southern countries have challenged the fact that non-hegemonic knowledge has been marginalised, and that Western knowledge has been universal and taken-for-granted (Breidlid, 2013; Sefa Dei & Kempf, 2006).

The work of Freire (2000) and his “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” also became relevant both in the Norwegian and South African context. In relation to the poor, Freire discovered what he called ‘the culture of silence’. He realised that the ignorance and apathy of the oppressed “were the direct product of the whole situation of economic, social and political domination – and of the paternalism – of which they were victims” (p.30). The people that were oppressed were kept “submerged” in a situation where “critical awareness and response were practically impossible” (p.30). In addition to this, Freire found that the entire educational system was a major contributor towards the maintenance of a culture of silence, which can be connected to Bourdieu’s (1997) concept of the education system as a reproducer of inequalities. Through a “critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action”, the oppressed can become a critical and engaged human being in his or her society (Freire, 2000, p. 65).

Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” is located in the poorer, Southern part of the world. Nevertheless, Nordland (2009) claimed that Freire’s pedagogy is also highly relevant in the Western, richer world. As mentioned in the introduction, even though Norway is a rich welfare state, people feel left out of the general society, with relation to challenges such as language barrier, occupational positions, and colour of their skin. Those who are not able to follow the chase for higher education risk stigmatisation. The society has found its methods of organising the culture of silence, where several stigmatised groups do not stand up for their rights, accepting the fact that they are the losers of the society (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2014; Nordland, 2009). In what Nordland (2009, pp.14-15)

called the “climbing society”, people are transformed into things, programmed to fit into the society’s logic, and fixed into the society’s culture of silence. Furthermore, Nordland stated that the inhabitants of the richer countries need to ask themselves whether the education received by their children will make them independent, critical and creative people, and prepare them to build a good society or not. Or, if the reality, in fact, is that those who want to move forward in life and see opportunities for progress, bend for the system that created the large injustices we see in the world (Nordland, 2009, pp.14-15).

3. METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research about South Africa, including learners, teachers and principals, from five high schools of various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds required specific methods to answer the research questions. A mixed-method strategy, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, was used. There were overlapping areas between the two methods, and several researchers combined them through mixed-methods in various ways (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006). By the use of qualitative interviews, focus group and observations, a clear picture of the particular participants’ views and attitudes was obtained, and through the questionnaires, the most general perceptions at different schools were examined. The focus on ‘knowing more’ was one of the goals of integration (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006). A detailed discussion of these findings can be found in Sønsthagen (2013).

Regarding the Norwegian context, the discussions and examples were based on the 2014-report from IMDI, and several experiences were gained and conversations were conducted while working with the refugees who attended the introduction programme. Around 60–70 refugees attended the introduction programme in the municipality, and a majority of them came from Somalia and Eritrea.

Quantitative researchers are often concerned with the validity and generalisation of their results, whether the methods investigated what it was supposed to investigate and whether the result could be transferred to other situations or subjects (Bryman, 2012). The present study did not aim at such validation or generalisation. Rather, it aimed to find the connections between the views and perceptions of the South African sampling unit and Norwegian introduction programme and to examine the content of the introduction programme based on the theory of social justice.

The way I view the world, together with my choices, interpretations and analysis of this study, will most likely be coloured by my upbringing in a social democratic country like Norway. Research cannot be value-free, and this needs to be recognised and acknowledged (Bryman, 2012). This relates to the issue of reflexivity, which Guba and Lincoln (2005) defined as “the process of reflecting critically on the self as the researcher, the ‘human as instrument’” (p. 210). All data used in the formulation of this study were kept anonymous, and the examples from the Norwegian context were based on a general overview and not on specific persons.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section focuses on some of the connections found between the South African high schools and Norwegian introduction programme for refugees. The author has discussed the implications of these connections for the refugees attending the Norwegian introduction programme, in relation to social justice.

In the previous research on South Africa, the South African government failed to address the past divisions from apartheid, through a narrow approach to social justice and redress (Sønsthagen, 2013). This created a conviction amongst the participants that education reproduces inequalities rather than challenging them, which coincides with Bourdieu's (1997) viewpoint. The overall perception was that the people's socio-economic background, and to a certain degree, racial background, together with economic and cultural capital, determined their prospects in life. Thus, South African institutions conveyed the impression that some social positions were favoured over others. Rawls (1971) claimed this to be a natural fact that people are born into different social positions; nevertheless, when major institutions of the society favoured certain starting places over others, it became unjust.

In Norway, there is an increasing focus on academic education, and Lai (2013) warned against what she called "the master sickness", referring to the fact that more people are studying at master-level than ever before. In 2014, the county Sogn og Fjordane showed the lowest percentage (18%) of refugees who succeeded in attaining a job or joining the general education system directly after the introduction programme. The average percentage of such successful refugees in Norway was 44% (Integrerings- og mangfaldsdirektoratet, 2014). In 2014, during an informal review of the background of the refugees in the municipality considered for the study, it became evident that over 50% of the refugees had not completed primary education from their home country, and the majority of them attended Norwegian class at a lower level than was expected by the general education system and workforce. This may be one of the reasons why many of them ended up in the social welfare system. This shows that Bourdieu's (1997) concept of reproduction of inequalities was also relevant in this context and can be related to the Norwegian culture of silence, where refugees with a low educational capital were stigmatised, and silenced groups of the society (Freire, 2000; Nordland, 2009).

In addition, some of the refugees had bachelor degrees, and a few had master degrees from their home country. However, very few of them had papers from their educational institutes, and some of them had faced problems getting the degree approved by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education. The Norwegian labour force showed high demands regarding formal competence, and most jobs demanded, at least, a high school education and a certain level of Norwegian skills (Integrerings- og mangfaldsdirektoratet, 2014). Most of the employed refugees with degrees ended up doing jobs where higher education was not required. This coincided with IMDI's report, stating that working immigrants were overrepresented in jobs that did not require education (17% against 3% in the entire population). It can be claimed that Norway does not value the cultural, social and educational capital of the refugees in the country (Bourdieu, 1997). It might be argued that the Norwegian society creates inhabitants that bend for the system creating large injustices and stigmatised, silenced groups for themselves in order to move forward in life, rather than addressing these injustices (Nordland, 2009).

Both in South Africa and Norway, and in the world at large, it is argued that Western knowledge system and culture have hegemony while other non-hegemonic knowledge traditions play a more peripheral role (Breidlid, 2013; Glaser, 2013). The main understanding of the South African participants indicated that the Western knowledge and culture, together with Christianity, played a hegemonic role in the participating schools. Since Norway is a Western country, this knowledge and culture can be considered as natural. However, it can be argued that social justice in a wide approach is not achieved through the hegemony of Western knowledge. Through the focus of the introduction programme, one can question how socially fair the system is. At the same time, it is

important to note that the goal of the introduction programme is to train and prepare the refugees for a quality life in Norway (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet Introduksjonsloven, 2005). However, this raises a question, whether this should be done at the cost of the participants' culture, self-worth, and self-belief, and if the cultural recognition and value are not as important for the minority population. Self-worth is an important part of Rawls (1971) justice as fairness-theory; thus, damaging the self-worth of learners and participants is an injustice, and it reproduces inequalities in the society (Bourdieu, 1997).

The majority of the South African participants saw core skills, such as science, technology and English, as the most important subjects to learn. None of the respondents answered cultural knowledge and skills to be the most important. The report, "Low education as a poverty trap" (Van der Berg et al., 2011), supported this view. One of their conclusions was that South Africa should focus on core skills in English and computer literacy in order to 'come out' of the 'poverty trap'. This coincided with a narrow, neoliberal approach to social justice in education, aiming at the labour market rather than cultural and social skills, and knowledge (Grimaldi, 2012). The core skills needed in the labour market is important for the learners so that they can enter the labour force. A clear picture is obtained when especially considering the World Economic Forum Report (2014) that ranked South Africa as the last country with regard to the quality of math and science education.

The focus of the Norwegian introduction programme can be questioned based on the narrowness and neoliberal approach towards social justice, at the same time of preparing the refugees for joining the labour market. The Norwegian values and skills were stressed. Among others, the introduction programme focused on the importance of being punctual, withdrawing payment if the participants were late or did not show any documentation of their absence. It should be noted that not wanting to attend work placement, for instance, a grocery store because of the contradictions with Islam (selling pork and alcohol) was not accepted as a valid reason. The refugees could decide not to attend; however, they would lose money for the time they could have been at work placement. Furthermore, the importance of Norwegian culture and language were also stressed for the refugees to get a job. The reasons for this focus were that these skills were considered as important in the society, and the introduction programme ensured that the refugees would be self-sufficient in the Norwegian society. If the refugees wanted to follow the introduction programme, they had to follow the rules set by the government. Occasionally, they were given the choice to leave the introduction programme; nonetheless, they would have few rights in the society. The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration would give them a minimum amount of money since they had denied the benefits of the introduction programme. In addition, non-attendance in the required amount of Norwegian lessons (550 hours) and social studies (50 hours) (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet Introduksjonsloven, 2005), might lead to problems relating to the renewal of their permit. Thus, the refugees must see the importance of learning these core skills to enter the labour market.

Nevertheless, social justice requires more than a narrow, neoliberal approach focusing solely on economic terms. Cultural recognition and a feeling of self-worth are important parts of social justice and can be a way to diminish reproduction of inequalities and transform stigmatised, silenced groups into critically engaged human beings who can challenge the culture of silence (Bourdieu, 1997; Grimaldi, 2012; Rawls, 1971; Freire, 2000). The "notion of education as a social good", needs to be reaffirmed through a

different discursive framework focusing on democratic education (Grimaldi, 2012, p. 1151). A democratic approach to social justice and education is where structural factors are taken into account rather than a limited focus on the economics and labour market. This coincides with Rawls's point of view, who stated that:

“the value of education should not be assessed solely in the terms of economic efficiency and social welfare. Equally, if not more important is the role of education in enabling a person to enjoy the culture of his society and take part in its affairs, and in this way to provide for each individual a secure sense of his own” (1971, p. 101).

This indicates the importance of acknowledging the diverse knowledge traditions and cultures, rather than solely focusing on the hegemonic and Western knowledge and culture. It can be argued that cultural skills and knowledge are important in both contexts for several reasons, including identity building, a feeling of self-worth, and critical awareness, in order to create a more socially just society based on understanding, respect and tolerance. This coincides with Rawls' (1971) justice as fairness-theory, allowing all citizens to take part in their culture. A wider and democratic approach to social justice is needed, where education becomes a tool for social change, creating critical and engaged people equipped with the cultural capital required for participation and inclusion in the society and the skills relevant to the labour market.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In this study, the views of the refugees in the Norwegian introduction programme have not been considered; it has been based on the author's observations and previous conversations from the time the author worked with the refugees, together with IMDI's report on integration and settlement from 2014. Therefore, further research needs to be done on such issues with the focus on the refugees' voices. Through a critical dialogue, one can give a voice to what can be claimed to be a stigmatised, silenced group in Norway, lacking words for their rights (Freire, 2000; Nordland, 2009). It could have been interesting to conduct interviews with refugees with a residence permit, with more or less the same interview questions as the South African learners were asked. In addition, one could interview the Norwegian class teachers and people working with the introduction programme to see what their perceptions are regarding social justice and hegemonic discourse in the introduction programme.

6. CONCLUSION

Even though Norway is a well-resourced country and South Africa is a poor country with an emerging economy, a connection can be found when looking at the South African high schools and Norwegian introduction programme for refugees, many with an African background, with regard to social justice. This shows the importance of non-material factors when one looks at the importance of social justice in education. Even though both countries focus on the importance of being democratic countries, the content of both systems have been argued as reproducing inequalities based on a narrow, neoliberal focus on social justice that is based on economic terms. In order to achieve a wider approach to social justice, the differences in a social and cultural capital, as well as the cultural recognition needs to be taken into account. In this democratic approach to education, social justice may be achieved by ensuring that the South African learners and participants of the Norwegian introduction programme become critical thinkers who are not alienated in school or their programme, together with other social factors like race and religion

(Grimaldi, 2012). As Grimaldi claims, when focusing on limiting, neoliberal terms in an educational system, “any reference to progressive values such as education for citizenship, democratic schooling, active and critical thinking, students wellbeing and cultural recognition” seems to vanish (2012, p. 1150).

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