



Good teaching is the process of building environments, providing experiences, and then eliciting responses that can be reflected on.

The Pedagogy of Poverty

Versus Good Teaching

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Teaching is a process of 'drawing out' rather than 'stuffing in'.

People are not made - they are conserved and grown.

It is likely good teaching is going on whenever children are:

- involved with **issues they regard as vital concerns**

In effective schools the 'endless problems' are opportunities for important learning

- involved with **explanations of human differences**

Why are there rich people and poor people, abled and disabled, urban and rural, multilingual and monolingual, highly educated and poorly educated? Differences in race, culture, religion, ethnicity, and gender are issues that children and youths reconsider constantly in an effort to make sense of the world, its relationships, and their place in it.

- being helped to see **major concepts, big ideas and general principles**

At all levels and in all subjects, key concepts can be made meaningful and relevant.

- involved in **planning what they will be doing**

People learn to make informed choices by actually making informed choices. Following directions - even perfectly - does not prepare people to make choices and to deal with the consequences of those choices.

- involved with **applying ideals** such as fairness, equity or justice to **their world**

The environment, war, human relationships, and health care are merely a few examples of issues that students can be thinking about. Determining what should be done about particular matters and defending their ideas publicly gives students experience in developing principles to live by. Character is built by students who have had practice at comparing ideals with reality in their own lives and in the lives of those around them.

- **actively involved**

Doing an experiment is infinitely better than watching one or reading about one. Participating as a reporter, a role player, or an actor can be educational. Constructing things can be a vital activity.

- directly involved in a **real-life experience**

First-hand experiences like field trips are potentially more educational than vicarious activity, provided it is combined with reflection.

- asked to think about an idea in a way that **questions common sense, or a widely accepted assumption**

Students are taught to compare, analyse, synthesise, evaluate, generalise, and specify in the process of developing thinking skills.

- asked to **relate new ideas to ones learned previously, or that applies an idea to the problems of living**

The effort to educate thoughtful people should be guided by school activities that involve thought. The acquisition of information - even of skills - without the ability to think is an insufficient foundation for later life.

- involved in **redoing, polishing or perfecting their work**

It is in the act of review, particularly review of one's own work, that important learning occurs. Students can learn that doing things over is not punishment but an opportunity to excel.

- **reflecting on their own lives** and how they have come to believe and feel as they do

Autobiographical activities are readily extended into studies of family, neighbourhood, and community. What could be more fundamental to subsequent learning than self-definition?

What is the Pedagogy of Poverty?

A body of specific teacher acts:

- Giving information,
- Asking questions,
- Giving directions,
- Making assignments,
- Monitoring seatwork,
- Reviewing assignments,
- Giving tests,
- Reviewing tests,
- Assigning homework,
- Reviewing homework,
- Settling disputes,
- Punishing noncompliance,
- Marking papers, and
- Giving grades.

There are occasions when any one of the 14 acts might have a beneficial effect. Taken together and performed to the systematic exclusion of other acts, they have become the pedagogical coin of the realm in urban schools. **They constitute the pedagogy of poverty.**

Unfortunately, the pedagogy of poverty does not work. Youngsters achieve neither minimum levels of life skills nor what they are capable of learning. **The classroom atmosphere created by constant teacher direction and student compliance seethes with passive resentment that sometimes bubbles up into overt resistance. Teachers burn out because of the emotional and physical energy that they must expend to maintain their authority every hour of every day.** The pedagogy of poverty requires that teachers who begin their careers intending to be helpers, models, guides, stimulators, and caring sources of encouragement transform themselves into directive authoritarians in order to function in urban schools. But people who choose to become teachers do not do so because at some point they decided, "I want to be able to tell people what to do all day and then make them do it!" **This gap between expectations and reality means that there is a pervasive, fundamental, irreconcilable difference between the motivation of those who select themselves to become teachers and the demands of urban teaching.**

However, any teacher who believes that he or she can take on an urban teaching assignment and ignore the pedagogy of poverty will be quickly crushed by the students themselves.

The authoritarian and directive nature of the pedagogy of poverty is somewhat deceptive about who is really in charge. Teachers seem to be in charge, in that they direct students to work on particular tasks, allot time, dispense materials, and choose the means of evaluation to be used. It is assumed by many that having control over such factors makes teacher "decision makers" who somehow shape the behaviour of their students.

But below this façade of control is another, more powerful level on which students actually control, manage, and shape the behaviour of their teachers. Students reward teachers by complying. They punish by resisting. In this way, students mislead teachers into believing that some things "work" while other things do not.

The students' stake in maintaining the pedagogy of poverty is of the strongest possible kind: it absolves them of responsibility for learning and puts the burden on the teachers, who must be accountable for making them learn.

The few urban schools that serve as models of student learning have teachers who maintain control by **establishing trust and involving their students in meaningful activities, rather than by imposing some neat system of classroom discipline.** For genuinely effective urban teachers, discipline and control are primarily a consequence of their teaching and not a prerequisite condition of learning. Control, internal or imposed, is a continuous fact of life in urban classrooms — but, for these teachers, it is completely interrelated with the learning activity at hand.

Is it possible to describe a teaching approach that can serve as an alternative to the pedagogy of poverty? I believe that there is a core of teacher acts that defines the pedagogy one finds in urban schools that have been recognized as exemplary. **Unlike the directive teacher acts that constitute the pedagogy of poverty, however, these tend to be indirect activities that frequently involve the creation of a learning environment.** These teaching behaviours tend to be evident more in **what the students are doing than in the observable actions of the teacher.**
