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Our Education System Breeds Racism

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The inequalities embedded in our society and resulting in racism need to be scrutinised. We need to be sceptical of the role the education system plays in realising socioeconomic equity, cultural recognition and anti-racist teaching. “Race” is a troublesome concept because it has no generally agreed upon meaning. In popular usage race may mean all of humanity (that is, the human race or a nationality).

The concept of race looked at from a biological perspective begot racism. Racism is the dogma of the superiority of one race over another; it is often customarily accompanied by prejudicial treatment of people on the basis of race, skin colour and religion, among others. Racism is socially constructed. The idea and perception of such is often passed on to an individual during primary and secondary socialisation. Racism was socially constructed in the past as a strategic and ostracising plan to put white people in an economically preferential position.

Racism was a tool to channel profitable and objectified capital to the white minority. The apartheid regime that categorised people into racial classes and ethnicities promoted discrimination in schools. Schools differed widely in their funding and learning conditions and this type of inequality led to learning disparities that reinforced social inequality. Ironically, the same structure exists in a post-1994 democratic government.

Racism is a burning issue, mostly to black people. But there are forms of racism and it saddens me that our government and politicians focus on only one form of racism. Racism subsists in personal, institutional and systemic levels. Such forms of racism can be seen even in schools. It is empirical that children from the middle and upper classes attend schools that are well resourced, with highly skilled and experienced teachers.

Institutional racism cannot be blamed exclusively for the personal and interpersonal racism that is customary within pupils at school. Parents are the custodians of a child and, as such, they are responsible for a child’s primary socialisation since they are responsible for the upbringing of a child. Consequently, the manifestation of personal racism by a pupil might be censured upon parents.

This, however, does not dispute the authenticity that the *milieu* a pupil finds him or herself in plays a significant role in socialisation and assimilation of racial ideas. Schools indoctrinate pupils of the superiority and inferiority of races; the progression of racism is perpetuated through secondary socialisation at schools and society at large. Racism is perpetuated by these schools through assimilation. This is done by indoctrinating pupils that one racial class is superior to the other through the current curriculum.

The current education system and the government demoralise society in a sense that institutional racism is publicly valued. The contestation of the *Independent Examination Board* (IEB) from private schools and *Umalusi* (the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training) gives a depiction of pure institutional racism. This is pragmatic: IEB offers examinations for private schools which produce high pass rates and A-pupils who get admitted into universities and other institutions of higher learning, such as colleges.

IEB and private schools are expensive for most of black people. I will acquiesce to the fact that these institutions (private schools) are racists and not inclusive even in a democratic dispensation. It is empirical that private schools admit mostly white pupils and this is a manifestation of racism.

Despite change in attitude and race, social class remains one of the volatile issues in South Africa. Schools in rural and urban ghettos have long been marginalised. Such side-lined schools are occupied mostly by black pupils and have poor academic performance. These racial and class-crisis results, similar to apartheid, have led to disparities in educational resources between private schools and open schools (public schools, government-owned schools).

Most white pupils from private schools consider themselves of nobility because of their social class and their school's good performance. To counter racism, we need to be acquainted with the fact that social class and schools interconnect at some point and such interconnections are the determining factor of the social mobility of the pupils.

Middle- and upper-class pupils do well academically as a result of transmissible capital from their families, be it embodied or objectified capital. This reproduces the ills of our country, such as inequality. Such pupils graduate on time and institutionalised capital is secured for them; most black pupils languish in institutions of learning without valuable capital.

I am of the view that there is a dire need to have a curriculum that most pupils in this country relate to. A curriculum not Eurocentric or enshrining Western modalities, but one that addresses African problems through Afrocentric epistemology.

The current education system does not test or improve pupils' cognitive capacity. The basic education department followed a technical model of curriculum planning, which Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher who was a leading advocate of critical pedagogy, critiqued by stating:

“Education becomes an art of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the student patiently receives, memorises and repeats. This is the banking concept of education in which the scope of the action allowed to the student extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing deposits.”

Pupils are trained to memorise theories and write standardised tests that do not test how they have progressed intellectually but how much they have memorised or crammed. Problems in the educational institution harm society because most of the functions within society cannot be completely fulfilled.

I believe standardised tests are also culturally and socially biased and help perpetuate social inequality. There is a need for more vocational schools. We cannot put a fish and a bird through the same test to climb a tree. Racism flourishes in a capitalist state because it is profitable to a minority. *“Racism will disappear when it’s no longer profitable and no longer psychologically useful. And when that happens, it’ll be gone. But at the moment, people make a lot of money out of it, pro or con,”* said Toni Morrison, professor emeritus at Princeton University.

References

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