

Pearson through Developmental Paradigm Lenses

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Pearson would like to be an educational conglomerate, according to investigative reporter Anya Kamenetz (April, 2016). In addition to creating standardized tests, learning software, and test preparation materials, Pearson also publishes textbooks and was instrumental in designing the common core standards in the US (CCSS) for which they also created tests and sell preparation software. In 2012, Pearson established the Pearson Affordable Learning Fund (PALF) to invest in US charter schools and global, for-profit schools in developing countries. Indeed, as Pearson's globalism continues to increase, it is worth contextualizing their practices through the paradigms of development put forth by McCowan (2015). This paper will examine the Pearson global initiative through the lenses of three paradigms: liberal capitalism, Marxism, and radical humanism.

The Pearson educational initiative is an example of the liberal capitalist paradigm. According to McCowan, this paradigm involves the privatization of educational systems, even in poor areas (2015). McCowan states, "education not only serves to form productive workers but is also a source of profit making itself" (p. 37). Pearson partnered with the Philippine corporation Ayala to create a two-dollar per day private school, APEC, with the motto "APEC Schools: Affordable World Class Education From Ayala and Pearson" (April, 2016). Only those who can afford the daily two dollars can send their children to APEC, leaving the poorest to remain in the broken and corrupt school system; this lack of concern for inequality is another characteristic of the liberal capitalist paradigm.

When examined through the lens of the Marxist paradigm, the inherent problems with Pearson's model become more evident, and the system of dependency more clear. Pearson is a Western organization, which uses its curriculum to guide instruction and its assessments to gauge learning. Moreover, all instruction in APEC is in American English, the language of the former colonizer of the Philippines. Also, APEC is concerned with creating an employable workforce for Western companies, which continues the dependency dynamic. In the APEC school, the curriculum called Life Labs instructs the students on collaborative work to create public information campaigns. Kamenetz criticizes this focus on a curriculum of employability; she writes the students "may not be dissecting frogs, but they know how to shake hands and put together a PowerPoint" (April, 2016). The students become capital themselves as those who can embody the modern, capitalist ethos are more employable and therefore have the opportunity to earn higher wages.

Perhaps the radical humanism paradigm provides the greatest foil against which to compare Pearson's initiative. In contrast to liberal capitalism, radical humanism does not purport education as a means of development. Rather, education is "emancipatory [and] a conduit for and actual action of social transformation" (McCowen, 2015, p. 46). Radical humanism liberates all from their dependent roles of oppressors and oppressed with shared knowledge and social equity. Pearson does not promote individual actualization but instead inculcates the modern capitalist idea that education is meant to enhance wealth. Also, the Pearson initiative makes a commodity of education in that it gains capital from education and creates low-cost, employable workforces to sustain corporate earnings.

Overall, Pearson's foray into global education illustrates the liberal capitalist paradigm. If capitalism and the accumulation of wealth is what the world considers "development," then

Pearson is working towards the development of poorer countries in need of globalization.

However, if the assumptions of what is modern and developed are incorrect, as seen through the Marxist and radical humanist lenses, then Pearson is becoming a colonizer.

References

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