



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Education

Power and Subjects

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ABSTRACT

Located in the midst of hills, is an Indian boarding school, considered to be providing exemplary education. This paper is based upon the research study done in this boarding school in order to understand the nature of language pedagogy. However, interesting insights emerged during the course of the research study. Even though this school is popular for the 'right' kind of education it provides but the power hierarchy seems to be completely entrenched within the system. This paper brings out the insights of the researcher upon the dimension of power hierarchy and the subjects. Here, *subjects* refer not just to the content of the 'educational studies' designed for the students but subjects also refer to the teachers who seem to be the '*subjects*' of this power hierarchy within the educational courses.

In this paper I use the framework of Foucault in order to build upon my insights from the research and to address the larger question, 'Is Power Ubiquitous?'

This article is based on a research study done in 'The School'; a boarding school in order to understand the nature of language pedagogy. This paper brings out some of the insights of the researcher upon the dimension of power hierarchy and the subjects. Here, subjects refer not just to the content of the 'educational studies' designed for the students but subjects also refer to the teachers who seem to be the 'subjects' of this power hierarchy within the educational courses.

Context: In the midst of hills, is an Indian boarding school. It is located in the countryside, a little far from one of the metropolitan city. Right in the middle of a village it lies. Away from the hustle bustle of the city, the pollution and noise of the town it is a place as quiet as, that it provides ample space to hear one's own self quite loud. To begin with, I would like to bring out a few aspects from my stay at The School, in order to help the readers situate 'The School' well in their imagination.

The most striking aspect of this place is the immense beauty surrounding the valley and how well it has been kept intact. Long walks, here has been a treasure in themselves. Once in a while when you walk, you may spot a colony of ants swaying along or encounter a frog sitting on the stair right next to you. After a shower, which is quite rare in the area, it's not just the people and you sighting the happiness but a scorpion too come along dancing. A snake may sneak out from the hole, which in all this while you thought is the home of the giant lizard because you meet it right there every day.

When I reached 'The School', the first realization of its beauty that struck me immensely was, at night. Minimal pollution and almost the required number of lights makes it a place where nights are a lighter darker than other places. In a city, the experience of a night is quite hard to imagine truly. The only times we get to experience night is on silent deserted roads and that too comes along with fear; fear of the unknown, fear of attack, the rush of being late, and the memory of a news article of an unfortunate incident that occurred late at night, in a place so dark. Here in the school, everyday around 8:00 its pitch dark and in the background are stars as bright and sparking as it could be. So many stars, hardly a city dweller would have an opportunity to experience so peacefully. To add to the rhythm is the sound of the bamboo creaking constantly.

Often we used to visit the 'Study Centre' after our dinners at 8. The Study Centre is not a library as such. It is the centre which has the great potential to inspire any one to read and if you are fond of books, it's a paradise. To simplify it for your imagination, this place is on the first floor which has no chair to force you to sit straight and read. It has a few bamboo chairs, a few cushions on the floor, a few lamps that go exactly with the black backdrop and to add to the ethos is the voice of bamboos creaking and the wind blowing.

I know it's difficult to imagine it as a place and even hard is to imagine it as a school because image of a school to me at least comes with red bricks, a huge gate, classrooms and 'a' playground completely barbed each side and yes limited access to it. Sad I know. Been to any school in Delhi, it would be difficult to accept the idea of a school in a place as such.

The lifestyle at 'The School' is such that students use internet to the least possible, instead reading books is appreciated as a value. Access to television is only to watch movies and documentaries on fixed days and students have no access to mobile phones. Lifestyle here isn't about using the minimum unnecessary rather it's about restraining the unnecessary. This can be demarcated not just in the above statements but also in stuff like food for students. Students go for various activities like dance, skate, sports, cycling, gardening, rock climbing each day and the enormous space available around the school assists it well. The school has been well documented and appreciated for the kind learning environment as well as its curriculum design.

Now, I would specifically elaborate upon Hindi as a subject. From the very beginning, students have the option to select from Hindi or Telgu as their second language subject. English is a compulsory subject as well as the medium of communication in the school. This is particularly because students from not just different states of India but from abroad as well, study in the school. Till the elementary level, there are approximately five teachers, who teach Hindi.

Discussion on discourse would be incomplete if not addressed along, is the issue of power and domination. The concept "discourse" originates from Latin "dis- cursus", meaning "running to and from", and generally refers to "written or spoken communication". For Foucault (1972), it is through discourse (through knowledge) that we are created; and that discourse joins power and knowledge, and its power flows from our casual acceptance of the "reality with which we are presented".

During my day to day interactions I noticed that the Hindi teachers have formulated a group; group that isn't a group per say but one, which is a little distant from others. Even during juice break (which is a break of 15 minutes every day during school hours wherein teachers assemble together and briefly announcements are made and they interact with each other) they occupied fixed corner spots, together. Never ever I saw any of them taking initiative, giving any suggestion, or making any announcement during the period of my stay. It was interesting that even after school hours I found them together or only with their spouse going for evening walks. Even for dinners the scenario wasn't much different. One may imply, being comfortable in Hindi for such grouping. However, I think it is much more than that because it isn't the case that the other teachers don't know Hindi at all. Many of the

teachers can very well converse in Hindi too. Not knowing English properly espoused similar confining reaction in these Hindi teachers. However, the other way round didn't seem to be evident in any form.

Even after spending a minimum of 15 years for these teachers in this school, the reason for these separations are because they don't feel comfortable with the idea of not knowing English properly. One may find it very contradictory that still some of them managed to spend around 20 years in this place. However, if we place this idea carefully we'll find that it is actually in sync. They managed to do it, in order to provide good education to their own children in this renowned English medium school. Rishi Valley School which provides a very high concession to the wards of the teachers related to their fees, the idea that their own child would be able to study in such a school is a major motivation that kept them intact here. It would be right to say that when they had their own children here that they felt more settled in 'The School', a place too isolated and providing a very different living environment which isn't very easy to adapt to. It isn't merely because they would provide education to their child here but because they got more engaged with their household and didn't have to interact much with other people. Moreover, children started visiting their kids and play with them so they felt more a part of the whole set up and place. This lack of confidence of Hindi teaching teachers can be taken to be their own inferiority complex rather than that implicated by others upon others but this do reflect the status accorded to a language in comparison to another. Language doesn't purely remain a language but related to it are prejudices, status and prestige associated to it.

Hence, being associated with a certain language has led to subjectifying themselves and is quite explicit in their behavior and interactional patterns. Hence, there is a certain form of power relations which make individuals 'subject'. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. Due to socially constructed variables associated to a language, once identity becomes a constraining structure impacting the lifestyle and behavior. Hence, both meaning of 'subject' seems quite apparent. Only the pedagogy of knowing, with its emphasis on dialogue and conscientisation, can help move beyond the constraining structures.

Reference

1. Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. New York: Pantheon.