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Don't Bank on Today's Education

By Donny Scheffler

According to Paulo Freire, a person as well as the world is ever-changing and unfinished. The purpose of education is to let the learner achieve the highest education they could possibly want for themselves. In doing so, the learner should not only be learning about the world as it exists, but also as it changes. The method of learning that prepares people for this world is called the problem-posing method. This method is ideal because it teaches in such a way that the learner is not just memorizing or consuming facts, but using these facts and ideas to fully understand the concepts of the subject. In contrast, the method of just consuming these facts and ideas as they are being taught is called the banking concept, which is widely used in teaching children today. Although some people might say that the problem-posing method cannot be implemented in all subjects in school, I believe that it can be utilized in collaboration with the banking concept to better educate the youth.

In many schools across the globe today, children are being taught generally using the banking concept. As Freire described it, the students are "receptacles," in which they are fed facts and ideas that they will eventually be required to memorize and regurgitate. There is some

knowledge to be gained from this method of teaching, however it does not help the learner fully grasp the subject they are being taught. For example, in learning a subject such as history, a student memorizes the dates and locations of events in our history. The student spends their time knowing where and when something happened, rather than *why* it happened. The students then take the test, ace it, and are satisfied with what they learned. They now believe that they know it so well, when actually, they do not. Is this not unfair to students?

Although the banking concept does have its faults, it can be a great method of learning if utilized correctly. Subjects such as math and foreign languages come to mind when pondering the positives of this method. For instance, learning a new language can be very difficult, especially the vocabulary and grammar. In order to learn the vocabulary, one must memorize words and be able to implement them. It's the same for grammar, one must memorize endings and conjugations in order to be able to construct sentences and give the words the correct meanings. Math is very similar. The students learn formulas and theorems that help them find the solutions. These formulas and theorems are essential to learning the lessons. Without them, the student could not possibly do most of the problems. The banking concept is almost perfect for learning these types of materials. Subjects with definite answers, such as math, thrive off this concept.

In the problem-posing method, however, the learners are actively participating and discussing the subject being taught. The “teacher” and the “student” do not exist in a sense, for they are co-learners/co-teachers as a whole. In other words, the teacher learns from the students’ ideas, and in return, the students learn from their teacher. There’s no power struggle between the two. Instead, they aid each other in learning a concept entirely. To illustrate, the students in Finland have a system close to the problem-posing method. The system includes three teachers per classroom in which the teachers work together to help the students learn and fully understand what they are learning. One teacher speaks and guides the class in discussion during that time, the other two teachers walk around aiding the students that have questions about the material. Therefore, the students are never left behind. Also, they aren’t caught up in standardized tests like other nations are. They have these tests but they only give them to small sample groups of students and only to “trust teachers.” Instead of these banking style standardized tests, they require students to take art, music, cooking, carpentry, metalwork, and textiles at an early age. These classes allow students to learn by experience, rather than by knowledge that is fed to them. Therefore, these classes are problem-posing in nature. “These classes provide natural venues for learning math and science, nurture critical cooperative skills, and implicitly cultivate respect for people who make their living working with their hands” (Abrams, 2011).

Although the problem-posing method sounds like a great option for learning, there are a few shortcomings. In order for this method to work, the learners must want to learn and participate in the classroom. If the learner decides to take a backseat to the discussions and misses something, he or she may not be able to fully grasp the concept. They may have to ask the same question again, putting them and their fellow peers a little bit behind. It could then be frustrating if all of the students are actively leaning and participating except for one or a few. This could also lead to that one or few students depending on the others to bring their grade up and basically “learn for them.” To illustrate, people will take what you give them, and if you give them a chance to cruise on by without participating, they will. It would be hard to grade someone in a discussion class if they based all their ideas on another person’s point of view, which they easily could do and get away with. If children were forced to learn in only this method, they would naturally resist. So, the learners must have an option of learning via the problem-posing method, or they will take advantage of the system.

Thus, an education system in which both the problem-posing method and the banking concept are applied is essential to learning and fully grasping the concepts of a subject. In this system, students would learn and memorize facts and ideas about a subject and then be able to use them in real life situations. It would be like two different classes in one: the banking method used for teaching the basics of a subject, and

then the other, a problem-posing scheme used to further their knowledge of the basics, enough to prepare them for using it in the real world. In other words, the banking method would be a prerequisite for the problem-posing method. Would this not be a great way to learn a subject entirely? Take learning math, for example. As discussed before, the formulas and equations are suited well for the banking method, yet they cannot teach engineers or scientists how to use them in real life. In cooperation with the banking method, the problem-posing method can give the learners an infinite ceiling on the applications of the math that they are learning. Rather than just doing math problems on a piece of paper for the entire class, the students are thinking of ways as to how these formulas and theorems were developed and/or could be developed in the future.

Consequently, there cannot be only one definite way to learn. As shown in *2 Million Minutes*, students from around the world are learning in various different ways. Brittany and Neil, the American students are learning primarily through the banking method at school, but they do experience problem-posing methods in such ways as sports teams and clubs. They come together, discuss, and figure out ways to solve real life problems, which better prepare them and get them in the right mind set for careers in their future.

In China, however, the banking method seems to be the only way Xiaoyuan and Ruizhang are being taught. Their individuality and power to learn are being taken from them, and because of this, they aren't as well rounded. They had developed all the book smarts via the banking method, but couldn't push themselves further. No wonder they didn't make it into the top schools they wanted to get into. India seems to be in a better state than China, but students like Rohit and Apoorva seem to get caught up in the banking method of learning. They have more ways of using the problem-posing method like in the few sports and activities in which they participate, but it isn't sufficient.

If you look at Finland, however, they are at the top of all rankings in school, and they utilize the problem-posing method the best. They seem to blend the banking method and problem-posing method perfectly to get their students to learn, and it shows in the results. This must prove they must be doing something right. Collectively, the banking method and the problem-posing method of education are the key tools in educating our children for the future in today's fast-paced and ever-changing world.

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