

## Aims of 'connecting' as a strategy

At the very beginning of the article, I would like to say that this article is intended to open up a dialogue to make a connection happen and a pedagogy of connect to evolve within the arena of formal learning. It is of utmost necessity at a time when the whole world is fragmented by a pandemic, racism and the climate crisis. Our learning entirely in an enclosed educational space which not only functions like a learning machine but also as a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding. (Foucault, 1991) has failed miserably creating 'psychic anxiety and existential uncertainty' (Pathak,2020).

Why is this? It is because our disconnected learning does not create opportunities of learning rooted in the social, economic and cultural reality of the learners, especially the disadvantaged learners. The arena of secondary education is now filled with first-generation learners (FGLs) because of the various educational policies and schemes. First-generation learners in the rural secondary schools 'who belong to many social categories' (Banerjee,2017) feel a sense of otherness in formal, 'enclosed educational spaces' because the pedagogy neglects 'the manner in which these students are motivated, are self-efficacious, form language learning beliefs and acculturate' (Jamshidi,2013). Therefore, it is the responsibility of all the stakeholders of education to create learning spaces for those disadvantaged learners which ensures 'equitable participation' of the learners irrespective of their generational status.

I have discussed elsewhere (Banerjee,2018) the challenges that FGLs face in school and how the schooling processes contribute to their alienation. The formal enclosed spaces of learning are indeed 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power...' (Pratt,p. 34)

As a language facilitator and a researcher who likes critical inquiry even within the pedagogy of neglect that is delivered on the basis of a 'banking model'

(Friere, 1970), the conceptual framework of this article is dependent on 'critical consciousness'. This article endeavours to develop pedagogical strategies that can be deployed to 'break the fourth wall' (Brechtian theatrical technique) and pave a way for creating 'critical consciousness' among all learners.

## Identification of neglect

As a language facilitator, especially a second language, I have to keep in mind that the goals of language education as dictated by the educational policies, schemes and the demands of the privileged is to develop 'grade-level competencies' and introduce the learners to new cultural norms. For FGLs whose second language acquisition is akin to learning a second culture (Brown, 1986), second language classes become an ordeal because the 'formal, elaborate, context-independent language of school is different from the restricted, esoteric code of conversation at home' (Barnstein,1971). Moreover, the burden of learning grammar before writing ruins the prospect of engaging meaningfully with an alien language. So, I suggest that identifying areas of neglect hidden in the pedagogical approach of language learning is the first step to begin the pedagogy of connect which is the foundation stone of a strategy that can overhaul the entire language learning process and aid the formation of critical consciousness.

As an independent researcher and a language facilitator in a government-aided rural secondary school, I have found that our education system remains co-opted into an economic imperative centred on growth and inequality. The process of alienation begins here. There is a 'culture of silence' among all learners, but more so among the FGLs.

Being a second language facilitator, I need to identify how my pedagogical approaches become only a 'means used to exert linguistic power' (Phillipson,1992) and establish the dominant narrative of a monolingual world. It will help FGLs to start questioning their own language

learning beliefs. First-generation learners should be encouraged to critically look into their own language learning beliefs and how it affects their attitude towards their own mother tongue. This will help them to question the neglect latent in the language of the privileged class and how this neglect is embedded in the pedagogical strategies followed by schools. Once the neglect is identified, then, the remaining steps fall into place.

### **Classroom organisation**

I consider classroom organisation has a major role in creating connected learning. It captures the structural aspects of how a teacher structures his or her classroom (Strange, et al). The present physical organisation of the classroom makes the learner sit in rows and the facilitator seems to be pitted against them, standing. This very organization creates 'a single great table' with many different entries, under the 'scrupulously "classificatory"' eye of the master' (Foucault, 1991). First-generation learners who confront this form of arrangement for the first time feel a sense of otherness in the process which hinders the making of meaningful connections with the classroom processes. Therefore, they are left behind in attaining grade-level competencies and tend to avoid the proximity of the facilitators and others, who have a background of formal learning in the classroom (Banerjee, 2013). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the facilitator to change these arrangements by rearranging the learners in a circle or a semi-circle with the facilitator seated within the circle. It becomes challenging in a large class. In such classes, it is needed to introduce rotation of seating arrangements on a daily basis.

### **Engaging the learners**

The enclosed educational spaces where I deliver my language classes are pedagogical machines which reaffirm the imperatives of health, qualifications, politics and morality (Foucault,1991), and neglect all real-life affirming processes. The education I deliver is deeply embedded with the 'self -perception of modernity- its notion of human supremacy over Nature, narcissistic belief in unlimited 'progress'

through the oracle of techno-science and its power to predict, control and establish order' (Pathak,2020).

First-generation learners, who are nascent learners in secondary education, are trying to soak in the code of the so-called 'modern learning' for the formal elaboration of social hierarchy, need assertion of the fact that the learners themselves are enriched with the vast array of knowledge that they have already acquired from their experiential living. They should be encouraged to help the facilitator and the others to 'unlearn modernity' in the present world, where teachers and educators have failed to impart meaningful connectedness with the 'nuanced art of living' (Pathak'2020).

The engagement of the comparatively less conditioned minds in a language class should serve as a springboard for affirming their dignity through localised literature and songs. The learners, irrespective of their generational status also understand the consequences of the plundering of Nature and critically enquire their own roles in the anthropogenic climate crisis. Student-led seminars based on the topics of their own choices have to be conducted weekly within the classrooms to promote a dialogical relation in the classrooms and introduce the learners to a new praxis of connectedness by becoming critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher.

Assessment: The final cog in the wheel

The present process of assessing objectively with the help of MCQs tends to develop fundamentalism among the learners. They are indoctrinated to the concept of a single correct answer. Moreover, the young minds are already conditioned to have total faith on the degree – job nexus. The higher the degree, the better the job makes the overhauling of the assessment process a challenge. Therefore, to introduce learners, especially FGLs, to critical thinking, the projects should be based on their direct experiences of lives and languages. Though this strategy would be hard to follow in the beginning, once practised would yield the expected outcome - creating critical consciousness.

## References

- Banerjee, J. (2018). The Excluded Variable in Quality Learning: Generational Status, A Case Study of First-Generation Learners Enrolled in Rural Schools, Bankura
- Barnstein, B. (1971). Class, codes and Control, Volume III, Towards A Theory of Educational Transmission
- Brown, H.D. (1986). Culture Bound: Bridging the Culture Gap in Language Teaching, Cambridge Language Teaching Library
- Foucault, M. (1991). Discipline and Punish, Penguin books
- Garavan, M. (2010). Opening up Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, ResearchGate, Doi10.2307/30023905
- Jamshidi, K. (2013). Generational Status: An Ignored Variable In Language Learning, The Journal of ASIA TEFL, Vol: 10, No.2, pp-35-62, Summer 2013
- Pathak, A. (2020). Mainstream, VOL. LVIII No.23
- Pratt, M. L. (1991). Arts of the contact zone. Profession, 1991, 33–40. (Originally a keynote address at the Responsibilities for Literacy Conference, Pittsburgh, PA, September, 1990.)



**Joyeeta Banerjee** has been working as an ESL teacher at Nikunjapur High school, Bankura, West Bengal for the last 18 years. Prior to this, she has worked as an assistant teacher at Araldihi High School and a guest lecturer at Bankura Sammilani College. She works as an independent researcher and has published papers on diverse topics. Joyeeta is the recipient of the National Child Rights Research Fellowship (2012) from CRY. She can be contacted at [joyeeta007@gmail.com](mailto:joyeeta007@gmail.com)

Seeing the seed through its germination process, understanding the trees in one's vicinity...This real learning is the purpose of our schools, which also reassures the child of this purpose and determines if she finds it a space for herself or not.

*Shivani Taneja, Bringing the Last Child into School, p 79.*