

# **Theoretical Foundations of Development And Socio-Educational Change: A Historio- Analytical Approach**

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Approach - Abbas Ali Shameli**

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This text analyses Western theories of education, ranging from traditional, pre-modern, modern and postmodern perspectives, to compare them to the Islamic perspective in an attempt to reach some points of commonality.

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# Theoretical Foundations of Development And Socio-Educational Change: A Historio-Analytical Approach

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## **Abstract**

An understanding of socio-educational change in any culture rests on a fundamental basis in the theoretical frameworks of both spheres. To reach this understanding, I have investigated in this paper the Western tradition and incorporated pre-modern (classic), modern and postmodern perspectives. The main concentration, however, has been the modern period. My goal has been to examine the possible link between theories of social and educational change and arrive at the point of comparison between Islamic and Western perspectives in my next researches. I have selectively reviewed the history of Western theoretical development to discover the origins of present heterogeneous orientations in socio-educational change. The educational concentration is more explicit in theories that convey educational connotations.

**Key terms:** Socio-educational changes, Pre-modern, modern & postmodern theories, Evolutionary &

revolutionary theories, enlightenment, modernization, dependency and world–system schools of thought

## **Importance of Theoretical Foundations**

Any analytical discussion of development and education requires a clear understanding of the theoretical foundations. Individual choice, behavior and priorities derive from basic philosophical, ideological and experimental orientations about social reality (Paulston 1977, 371). Policies of change in any form and any domain are the outcome of underlying theoretical frameworks. Developmental change and educational reforms imply that previous theories have been challenged at a deeper level.

In this paper, I shall look at some major theoretical categories regarding development and socio–educational change. For me, educational change is part of wider changes on a social level. Social change also depends on the function of educational parameters. Not only do schools teach necessary social skills and roles, they are also expected to inculcate appropriate ideas, values, and worldviews in an effort to develop a ‘new person’. Therefore, some scholars view education as part of the means of social transformation (Carnoy & Samoff 1990, 7). To understand the roots of educational change, it is vital to reexamine the interrelationship between social and educational change.

As Paulston maintains, many unspecified theoretical and ideological axes are the foundations in educational change and reform studies; however, most of these are latent. It is also important to examine the impact that political power, ideology, interests and external factors have on decisions about socio–educational changes; even more important is an understanding of the resulting conflicts over reform priorities (Paulston 1977, 394). Education in its broadest sense includes formal, informal and no–formal realms (Hallak 1990, 6). Formal education, particularly, is a part of the state. Therefore, it always promotes political values that may contradict other social aspects (Carnoy & Samoff 1990, 9). Since the nature of the state determines the character of education, schools are sites for conflicts about the character of and control over the state (Carnoy & Samoff 1990, 380). For many social thinkers, then, it is vital to rethink the role of state and political system as well as cultural and economical dynamics in educational change (Ginsburg 1990, 478).

## **Categorization of Theories**

Providing an inclusive classification of all heterogeneous orientations of social and educational change is a difficult task. Some scholars have grouped these theories into three categories: theories of transmission, interpretive theories and transformation theories (Demarrais 1995, 3). Older studies classify theoretical frameworks into two main categories, one which emphasizes the equilibrium paradigm and another that views inherent instability and conflicting elements as the key factor in explaining social change (Paulston 1977, 375–76). Allahaar (1989) offers a territorial scale. Social evolutionism, for him, belongs to a European perspective; modernization is viewed as an American (including Latin American) point of view and dependency as a Third World approach. Allahaar concludes

that various theoretical perspectives are categorized whether based on a macro-structural or micro-interpretive methodology (Allahar 1989, 141).

In my view, any territorial classification prevents us from acknowledging that all theoretical frameworks are derived from a single trend. In Allahar's theory, the occurrence of the Enlightenment, for example, will be seen as the background for European theories while its possible influence on North American theories will be ignored. In his comparative survey of the history of philosophy of education in the second half of the past century, Beck (1991) insists on this independency.

Although Saha and Fagerlind's (1983) classification of theoretical framework is relatively old, it remains clear and comprehensive. They have described social theories of the pre-modern and modern periods. It is necessary, however, to go beyond their analysis and examine the critical impact of postmodern theories. Although I have alluded to the postmodernist perspective, it is beyond the scope of the present work and requires an independent study.

It is also important to know that recent social thinkers and educational reformers tend to be synthetic in their approach rather than supporting a single one-sided theory. This is, indeed, a postmodernist integration which tends to facilitate dialogue among differing theoretical orientations (Rust 1996, 29). No single theory is capable of giving a comprehensive explanation about social and educational change. Through a macro review of the history of knowledge in comparative and international education, Paulston has drawn this trend. He contends that since World War II three major periods have emerged: orthodoxy, heterodoxy and heterogeneity. For him, the 1950s and 1960s are the duration of hegemonic and totalizing influences of functionalism and positivism. The by-product of these related theoretical orientations was law-like statements and generalizations.

Heterodoxy emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and defeated orthodox paradigms through critical and interpretive views. In the 1990s, the heterogeneous atmosphere allows knowledge communities to participate in a complementary dialogue. Social thinkers have reached the point that they can recognize, tolerate and even appreciate the existence of multiple theoretical realities and perspectives. The collapse of legitimacy of meta-narratives has resulted in what Derrida conceptualized as re-knowing 'difference' (Rust 1996, 32). Difference for postmodernists means to listen to all voices. Ginsburg and his colleagues observe that any adequate understanding of national and local educational reform is due to a consideration of development in the world system, both peripheral societies and core ones. Regional educational reform cannot be well investigated unless we take into account global structural and ideological context (Ginsburg 1990, 493-4).

## **Education as a Key Element**

Among other factors, education has been considered a key variable in the developmental process. Based on the specific conception of development and the proposed structure and goals that are identified for development, education, used properly can be an important instrument for development.

Critical thinkers also trace social problems and discriminatory values and attitudes back to educational systems.

Having a minimum level of national education is only a part of developmental proposals. Nations are now investing in education as a tool for global competition. Restructuring the educational system in order to meet the prerequisite of inescapable change at either the global or domestic level is of primary importance for educational planners. It is believed that the important role of education refers to its decisive contribution to both national development and individual well-being (Schultz, 1980). People and not things are now regarded as the goals of development. As indicated in the first Human Development Report, "People are the real wealth of a nation." (Human Dev. Rep. 1995, 117).

Among the five 'energizers' of human resource development provided by UNDP – education, health and nutrition, the environment, employment and political and economical freedom – education is undoubtedly the basis for human development (Hallak 1990, 1). However, it is doubtful that education could play any constructive role without a clear understanding of function of variables like the definition of the word development, the theoretical frames of development, the social context of putting a theory into practice, and the preferred development strategies.

Philosophers and social scientists have often interpreted and explained the reality of social change in their age based on particular theories. A common paradox for all theories of development and social change is to explain and interpret past event. If social commentators explain the past after it has happened, they are faced with the problem of their own subjectivity. If they are interpreting the social events of their own time, they are at risk of taking short-term variations as a whole process of a larger trend. This limitation stems from the fact that social change can only be perceived through a macro-inclusive perspective (Fagerlind & Saha 1983, 5–6).

## **Theories of Development (Western Tradition)**

### **Pre-modern Theories**

A study of developmental orientation in Western tradition usually begins with the classic cyclical theories. In this group, Greeks in general and Aristotle in particular are the most prominent. Development, for them, occurs in a cyclical form which leads to the formation of the State. For them, the formation of the state plays a central role in social change. Changes begun in the independent social structure of the family lead to the emergence of villages; later a combination of villages ends up with the appearance of a State. The central idea in this theory is the fact that development is a natural unfolding of the family toward the formation of the State. According to classical thinkers development is a set of continuous cycles of growth and decay. Modern scholars allege that this doctrine stems from the closeness of the classical thinkers to nature. Little or no attention was paid at this stage to education. A more precise review of the works of Greek philosophers may result in the elucidation of the role of education.

St. Augustine articulated a Christian view of development that differed from that of the Greek thinkers; he considered the cycle of development as unrepeatable, single and unique. Thus, the cycle of growth and decay is a single process, begun with the creation of Adam that has flourished since the first coming of Christ and will end with the collapse of the material world. In this perspective, the notion of natural process, a distinguishing characteristic in the Greek view has been replaced with the “will of God” as the key element in the process of change in this world. Followers of this view looked at the future of the material world pessimistically, holding the idea that humankind is nearing destruction; some continued to hold such beliefs even after the Enlightenment, associated with advances in science and technology. As little choice is given to individuals in this theory due to its pessimistic view, education can't play a major role. New theories emerged only in the 17th and 18th centuries; although optimistic, they retained elements of the Augustinian view (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 8).

## Theories of Enlightenment

Western developmentalists entered a new phase with the occurrence of the Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries. They optimistically viewed the human future as ever-changing but progressive. Among Christians, Protestant reformation was a reaction to traditional Christian thought. Enlightenment optimism emerged in writings of various intellectuals. In France in 1688, Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle proposed the idea of unlimited and unending progress as a dominant norm over all civilizations. Descartes, another French philosopher focused on rational knowledge as an elevated element above other human uncertain beliefs.

In Germany, the philosophy of Leibniz offered the idea of continuity and graduity in development. In the late 18th century, Kant insisted on natural continuity as the main characteristic of human civilization. While he accepted the possibility of interruption in the developmental process, he believed that progressive movement never ceases. The Enlightenment optimism then reemerged in works of Condorset and Rousseau. The latter considered education a tool to help person become a part of civilized society while remaining uncorrupted by it (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 9–11). This is probably the first explicit emphasis on the role of education in social change.

## Pioneers of Modern Social Thought

More systematic and complex forms of the Enlightenment theories were formulated in the 19th and 20th centuries. Evolutionary is a general heading which covers all these theories, basically identified by six main assumptions. In these theories, change and development are characterized as **natural, unidirectional, momentary, continuous, necessary and stemming from identical causes**. For the evolutionists, social change progresses from a primitive to a modern complex mode. However, they insist that the trend of social change always evolves piecemeal rather than revolutionary. (So 1990, 19).

The pioneer of this group of theorists was a German philosopher, George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. His

theory of development is close to classical Greek and Roman thought (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 11). Hegel's dialectic theory, which opposed the previous stage-based developmental views, influenced later thinkers such as Marx and his followers. This conception was elaborated by a French philosopher, Auguste Comte, who founded the cornerstones of modern sociology through his three-staged form of positivistic explanation of evolution of human life. For Comte, theological, metaphysical and scientific or positivistic are three hierarchical stages of evolution that have occurred in human life. In other words, religion, reason and science, according to Comte, played major roles in explaining social change. Comte's theory offers the new idea that the stages of social change are indicators of development in human thinking. He argues that the only cause of all social changes is the change in man's mind. As he views science as the final stage, clearly Comte would admit education a large role in scientific advancement.

In the late 19th century, Herbert Spencer, a British philosopher, joined the evolutionary school of thought. He proposed the idea of the "survival of the fittest" as an explanation for evolution in human society. He believed that, similar to the plant and animal kingdoms, human society runs based on the principle of the "survival of the fittest." Works of the French sociologist of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Emile Durkheim, are the scene of the next evolutionary drama. Durkheim and his contemporaries looked at society as a living organism, progressing from a simple phase to a more complicated modern one. In this view, human society is not a whole integrated organism whose components all develop simultaneously. Therefore, societies are always divided into developed and undeveloped. Undeveloped societies are representatives of the primary stage while the developed communities are examples of modern and complex phases of the developmental process.

A sociological analysis may indicate the impact of these evolutionary theories on all colonial movements. Dividing human society into developed and undeveloped societies created the attitude that developed societies should help undeveloped ones to walk through the same evolutionary path already experienced by the former. The aiding policy provided a justification for colonization (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 12-14).

By the early years of the 20th century, evolutionary theories faced multidimensional challenges. The occurrence of two World Wars gave rise to questions the irreversibility of a single developmental process in human life. Societies could decline even as they appeared to be heading for further development. Highly traditional religious rituals remained in modern industrial circumstances despite the fact that social theorists regarded them as relics of the primitive stage of change. The explanations of evolutionists which had proposed that each society transfer from a less-developed phase to a more civilized stage were strongly challenged. These challenges devalued the viability of evolutionary theories and paved the way for the emergence of those explanations which interpreted social changes based on the function of social structures (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 14).

This new interpretation was the result of both anthropological and sociological understandings. Structural-functionalism emerged and dominated sociological thought during the four decades between

the 1930s and the 1970s. Systematic formulation of this theory was primarily due to the efforts of Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton.

Modern models and approaches which had their philosophical roots in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of the Enlightenment in Europe can be divided into two very broad categories. One group viewed the economic interests of nations and classes as harmonious. Others looked at those interests as conflicting (Black 1991, 23). The central element in social change was economic interests.

Influenced by early biological studies, Parsons formulated his social theory based on a biological organism metaphor. For proponents of this theory, society is like a whole system composed of interrelated parts (religion, education, political institutions, family, etc.). These parts function based on a homeostasis principle to achieve harmony and equilibrium. If a pathological event creates a social tension, all parts must function to regain equilibrium. The harmonious coordination among institutions led Parsons to conceptualize the society as a “system.” (So 1990, 20) According to a functionalist view, the purpose of schooling is not limited to an intellectual one, it also includes political, economic and social aims (Demarrais 1995, 7). They view schooling as sites for meritocratic selection and socializing students for existing citizenship as well as places where people can be trained for stratified occupational roles (Demarrais 1995, 183).

Structural-functionalists depart from evolutionists in viewing all social changes as functions which result in social harmony. Therefore, any kind of conflict or tension is malfunctional to social harmony. This theory, like the previous schools of thought, could not successfully refute all critiques and challenges. Since it did not take conflicts, clashes and disharmonies into account, it has been criticized as static. Moreover, it was accused of conservatism because it considered both conflict and tension dysfunctional. Adaptive change is only possible for followers of this theory through education which results in both individual and social change. Therefore, schools are only pattern-maintainers. Schools are not, and in fact cannot be, innovators. Educational reform must then be a result of an interaction between society and schools (Paulston 1977, 379).

Educational reform in an equilibrium-paradigm structural functionalist view is a way of improvement. It must improve the educational system's effectiveness, efficiency or relevance. Although these goals may accommodate the educational system to the world of work, they may also increase or at least reinforce inequalities in education and society. Moreover, it is not easy to determine consensual goals and procedures for an educational system. Some people perceive as constructive what others view as destructive or regressive by others. (Ginsburg 1990, 476).

These challenges facilitated the emergence of a type of neo-evolutionism at the hands of scholars like Talcott Parsons, the founder of structural-functionalism.

The neo-evolutionary form of structural-functionalism was an effort to explain social change through an evolutionary perspective. The evolution of societies, for neo-evolutionists, was a three-staged process

of integration, differentiation and reintegration. This melded version of structural–functionalism has opened the gate for modernization theory (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 15. Cites from Parsons, 1966).

Modernization theory has been a dramatic reaction opposing the evolutionary theories of the 1920s and 1930s since its emergence in the 1950s. The lack of convincing intellectual evidence for the separate evolutionary and functionalist theories urged modernists to think about a synthetic model consisting of evolutionary and functionalist assumptions (So 1990, 18–19). Moreover, the intellectual consequences of the two World Wars and the disintegration of the European colonial empires in Asia, Africa and Latin America helped this theory to provide an optimistic picture for the human future. This theory was advocated first by the American social scientists in an effort to change the conditions of Third World nation–states and prevent them from falling into the hands of communist bloc led by the former Soviet Union (So 1990, 17). The central concern of this theory was to show the necessity for developing societies to follow the same path to development as the industrialized West. Citing Huntington (1976), Fagerlind and Saha profile the theory as follows:

“The process of modernization can be characterized as revolutionary (a dramatic shift from tradition to modern), complex (multiple causes), systematic, global (affecting all societies), phased (advances through stages), harmonizing (convergence), irreversible and progressive.” (1983, 15).

The achievement motive, reinforced by acquired modern values, is one psychological aspect which modernists elaborate on. Modern values can be taught, according to modernists, through socialization which takes place in social institutions such as families, schools and factories. Modernization theory suffers from its inability to show a causal link between achieving modern values and behaving properly. In this theory, there is a model which provides a five–set variable as a pattern of modernization. Modernizing institutions create modern values, modern values cause modern behavior, modern behavior will lead to a modern society which is economically developed. Except for the first two sets of variable, the causal link between the variable is doubtful and debatable. Moreover, scholars contest that it is impossible to provide the universal definition of modern values and modern behavior required by this theory.

Recent studies reveal that it is impossible to show a causal link between the proposed variables. In addition, some scholars argue that, unlike the fundamental assumption of modernization theory, modern attitudes are not necessarily incompatible with traditional ones. The third critique refutes the assumption that individual development equals social advancement. Modern values and behavior at the individual level will not inevitably lead to socioeconomic development unless all or a dramatic majority of individuals view and behave in this modern way. The final challenge condemns the modernization theory for its ethnocentric bias which has presents a view in which modernization equals Westernization (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 15–17).

Parallel to the development of a sociological approach to the modernization theory, economists also presented the human capital theory as a theoretical framework for explaining development based on

structural functional notions. For economists the development process required improvement in capital investment including human resources; according to them, this is the foundation of development in any society. Major figures such as Theodore Schultz observed that the process of qualifying labor force through education is a productive investment which facilitates economic development. Both modernization theory and human capital theory are strongly concerned with large public expenditure on education as a means of improving human capital. However, overemphasis of human capital theory on education and neglect of other factors like family background and the innate abilities which influence occupational and income success is an important critique of this theory.

Other structural factors like economic, political and social systems are influential in individual attainment. Another problem is that this theory could not precisely explain the impact of education on labor quality (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 17–19). Above all, since the human capital theory is production-centered, its emphasis on education is indeed an attempt to improve investments and increase benefit. Both Islamic and humanistic perspectives challenge the idea that the human being is merely a piece of capital.

Although social thinkers have implicitly or explicitly realized that any change or development is the result of a previous tension or conflict, some have regarded it as pathological or abnormal in relation to the existing social system. Therefore, in European thought only Hegel was the one who emphasized conflict as a key dimension in his theory of change. His dialectic model with its three-staged process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis influenced Marx to develop his new theory with an emphasis on social class conflicts. Marx proposed his theory as a way to resolve class tensions through an inevitable struggle between the two conflicting classes of society, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

The root of all human conflicts, according to Marx, is the economic structure, particularly, the modes of production and the concentration of capital in the hands of a small portion of society. Marx alleged that social institutions (including education) are means to create social norms proper to the economic structure. The propertied class aims to legitimize their authority through educational institutions. There will be no change in the social structure as long as the working class is not aware of its exploited condition (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 19–20). To mobilize the masses in their struggle with the capitalist system, developmental programs must include mass literacy and ideological conscientization. Through these two programs the proletariat may become aware of its situation as the victims of exploitation. (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 20, cited from Melotti, 1977).

Despite its considerable impact on developmental thought, Marxist theory missed some important points. While Marx spoke about colonialism, he neglected the idea of underdevelopment. (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 21). The overemphasis on class conflict prevents him from analyzing and accounting for cultural conflicts (Paulston 1977, 388).

I think social conflict is not restricted, as Marx has argued, to conflicts between economic classes. For example, religio-political conflict led to the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran. These motives outweighed the economic motives behind the Revolution. Fundamentalism for decades has been an accusation

against Muslim activists who suffered from ideological tensions. Except for the former Soviet Union, China, and some parts of Eastern Europe, most capitalist societies never experience Marxist proposal. Capitalism has functioned within the existing economical structure in many capitalist societies. These cloudy points led to the emergence of the dependency theory.

The dependency theory, unlike the evolutionary and modernization theories, looks at development as a causally related phenomenon of the changes that occur between and within societies. Development in a region or in a society is related to the underdevelopment of another region or society. This causal relationship exists between central or metropolitan societies on one side and peripheral or dominated societies on the other side. Inspired by Marx' ideas on class conflict and exploitation within a class society, the American economist Paul Baran developed the theory that poor condition in undeveloped countries is rooted in the high standard of living in the Western world (Baran, 1957). Studying the development problems of Latin America in the late 1950s and 1960s, Andre Gunder Frank reformulated this new systematic theory. The key concept of his theory is its division of the world into core and peripheral countries.

Despite its significant impact on recent thinking about development, the dependency theory has faced some critiques. Overemphasis on external causes of undeveloped conditions, ambiguity about the real consequences of foreign investment, trade and aid in some specific conditions, neglect of the impact of non-capitalist countries like the former Soviet Union and their relations with countries like North Korea and Afghanistan, are examples of the challenges addressed to this theory.

Present world conditions have necessitated a type of interdependent relationship between developed and developing countries. Dependency theorists are also unable to provide guidelines about non-dependent development. (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 21–24). The three decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s served as a battlefield for the conflicts between modernization, dependency and world-system schools of thought. In the late 1980s, social thinkers advocated a move toward synthetic theoretical frameworks (So 1990, 12).

## **Giving More Role to Education**

Several unanswered critiques have urged social thinkers to focus on some educational dimensions of development rather than establishing a new theory. In all previous theories education did not play a vital role. This tendency motivated liberation theorists to join Marxist and dependency theorists in placing more emphasis on education. Holding the same perspectives, the adherents of the liberation theory tried to find the roots of underdevelopment and the means of eliminating it. Using a humanistic approach, liberation theorists stated that the initial step toward development is to conscientize the oppressed population about the roots of their unjust conditions. The key instrument for liberation theorists is education. The word “conscientization” is borrowed from the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire whose works are prominent in recent development thought. His ideas are regarded as the earliest impetus for

the creation of later critical theories.

Freire sees development as identical to liberation and insists on the role of education as the key means to liberation. He argues that national salvation depends on the role of individuals. Individual understanding is helpful when it is free from the mediation and definition of Church authority. Education can or must help individuals to acquire self-reflection, discover the state hegemony and perform positive actions (Demarrais 1995, 28). Since education in developing countries can produce a literate population aware of the conditions which oppress them, it has been regarded a potential threat to the economic and political systems. To what extent education can promote liberation and exempt the oppressed from social difficulties needs further investigation (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 24–25).

Current understandings and interpretations of development are explicitly influenced by the ideas of conflict and upward movement which are keys in both revolutionary and evolutionary theories. Development, for modern thinkers, is viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon both in theory and practice. Therefore, all previous development theories are criticized for being one-sided and not comprehensive (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 25–28). It is difficult to give an accurate explanation of development without taking into account aspects like health, education, social well-being, political structure, ideological and cultural differences as well as environmental and economical dimensions. These can only be comprehensively examined in an inclusive perspective.

## **Postmodern Approach to Social Thought**

In opposition to the theoretical frameworks explained above, a new trend has emerged in the Frankfurt school in Germany under the name of critical theory. This group of social theorists and philosophers at the institute for social research during 1923–50 expressed views which contrasted with the positivism of Descartes and Saint Simon. The economic determinism of Marxism was another topic which they addressed critically. They were also concerned with the increase of human freedom through a radical transformation of social arrangements. Critical social thinkers believe that the existing natural and social sciences are unable to provide strong solutions for human problems. The convictions formulated in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and accepted until modern times must, in their view, be radically reviewed (Demarrais 1995, 26–7). These critical points of view were, in fact, precursors of the formation of post-positivism with the revival of concepts like the value of subjectivity, the legitimate use of non-experimental and qualitative methods and the rejection of absolute truth in science.

In education, critical theorists viewed schools as sites for a struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. Dominant groups invest in schools as tools for the maintenance of power through control of information and curriculum, specifically through the use of hidden curriculum. For them, schools can become sites of social change if they are not used as places of social reproduction. For this to occur teachers must be critical pedagogues and students should act positively and learn critically. In the middle and late 1980s, critical post-positivism also came under the attack of social theorists such as

postmodernists, poststructuralists and feminists (Demarrais 1995, 29–32). Postmodernists have created a new critical methodology in the social sciences.

It is difficult to integrate their premises and critiques of education. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, for instance, believes that problems always originate with the hegemony of a dominant state. Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault insist that the evaluation of knowledge will only be accurate when we see its connection to power. For them, the acquisition of reliable knowledge is possible when an open, free and uninterrupted dialogue takes place. They argue that facts are always interrelated with values. Human knowledge is shaped by the impact of social and historical contexts (Demarrais 1995, 27–8). Postmodernists also envision an eclectic move toward encompassing the perspectives and methods which may advance both human knowledge and understanding. They favor a perspectivism open to study cultural clusters' narratives and ways of seeing (Paulston 1996, 24).

The main concern for postmodernism is the avoidance of giving authority to what Lyotard calls “grand narratives” or “meta–narratives”. This concept as Cherryholmes (1988) defines is something “similar to paradigms that guide thought and practice in a discipline or profession.” Lyotard claims that postmodern skepticism toward meta–narratives results from their tendency to lock civilization into a totalitarian and logocentric thought system. Meta–narratives are totalizing discourses that claim universal validity. Instead of seeing society and history through a direct, subjective human experience, meta–narratives provide a totalizing theory which depends on abstract principles and theoretical constructs (Rust 1996, 31).

It should be noted that debates over socio–educational change and progress were not restricted to the Western tradition. (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, 9–11) Chinese civilization, the Muslim world, and other non–Western traditions have produced their own explanations for change and development within the contexts of their intellectual history. An inclusive global perspective requires an awareness of non–Western explanations.

## Closing Words

An inclusive approach is an effective lesson I have learned from studying socio–educational theories. New elements must also be considered. None of the theories discussed exhibits an emphasis on the impact of value systems and ideological input (belief system). In an Islamic world view change should begin with values and attitudes at an individual level. Social change is, in fact, a reflection of individual inner change. We behave as we think and as we evaluate. In addition, a possible method for socio–educational change is to approach it systematically. This approach views social and educational problems as interconnected, interdependent and interacting elements (Banathy 1994, 28). I have also come to understand that national reform policies are inevitably related to a global context. A realistic approach is another concern in my conclusion. To bring about realistic educational reform, we could start as Morgan proposes:

“Educational development starting completely anew almost never happens. We have schools and teachers laden with traditions which are not going to go away. Our task is, taking them as they are, to make them better; to make them more responsive to the needs of each child and responsive to the long-term needs of society. And we can’t stop the educational process while we figure out what needs to be done.” (Morgan 1994, 44).

In my view, it is difficult even through a synthetic approach to provide a uniform course of action for all societies. It may be more feasible to propose as inclusively as possible a mosaic of approaches which provides the ground for necessary domestic and multicultural considerations. It is vital to recognize and evaluate the ‘Other;’ their failures or successes enable us to make our own decisions. It is also important to realize that the implementation of educational reform is not only a way toward social development but is also an avenue to respond to the need for a basic human right.

To close these concluding remarks, I would like to quote Clive Becks’ final statement concerning his comparative survey about the philosophy of education: “We must accept complexity. But the happy paradox is that once we have accepted the impossibility of perfection, we will, other things being equal, come somewhat closer to achieving it.” (1991, 320)

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