

Is Education Still Attentive?: Instrumental Rationality and the Dislocation of Attention

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Learning is paying attention. Recognizing that modern education is on the cusp of the economics of data and automation of the market, this mode of attention has been dislocated. This has become incessantly evident in the Philippines where its education is postured as a response to global demand for technical workers and a supply chain of labor force for industrialized societies. Here, the production of 'attentive learners' legitimizes the imperatives of the neoliberal mechanisms upsetting the current conduct of education. The value of this 'attentiveness' finds its iterations in varied forms: rigid curriculum, standardized testing, outcome-based teaching methods, and the persistent curriculum hierarchy. In this milieu, attention becomes a command, albeit one that does not emanate from the learners but is levied to them. Using Simone Weil's notion of attention as an articulator, I argue that this dismal image sets the scene for the modern academe: (1) the rehearsal of learners as passive actors—and later, as passive workers—in the classroom; (2) the learners' attention as performance value measured through instrumental rationality, that is, the knowledge compatible with the neoliberal agenda. I further argue that the Weilian mode of attention is activated in an education that is decentralized, culturally sensitive, and takes a pluralist model of development. This portends an attending that enmeshes learners with real human conditions. Largely, this renders an education that is attentive to its praxical character: one that reflectively (re)orients learners to themselves and yet asks them to be critically receptive to the profound conditions of the others outside.

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