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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that teacher research, as an international movement, has the potential to become a counter-hegemonic strategy to construct critical teacher education approaches in a globalized world. It begins by describing globalization and discussing the distinction between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic globalization, or between "globalization from above" and "globalization from below." Next, it describes teachers research as a potential counter-hegemonic global movement, defining teacher research, offering a brief history of the teacher research movement, and looking at the primary characteristics of the current teacher research movement. Finally, the paper connects primary features of the movement with the question of whether current teacher research is a global movement and whether it is a counter-hegemonic initiative. It concludes that the teacher research movement has the potential to become a strategy to overcome traditional teacher education approaches. Because it is a bottom-up movement that has extended worldwide, it is possible to imagine communities of teacher researchers and networks of people from different parts of the world sharing their experiences, working for better teaching conditions and higher professional qualifications, and trying to create collective, collaborative, and emancipatory teacher education alternatives. (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

Teacher Research: Limits and Possibilities of Global and International Connections

Julio Emilio Diniz-Pereira

2002

Teacher Research: Limits and Possibilities of Global and International Connections[1]

Julio Emilio Diniz-Pereira[2]

Introduction

Rapid changes in the world due to the emergence of the information society, scientific and technological developments, and a growing global economy – have made intercultural and interethnic contacts a fairly ordinary phenomenon. However, paradoxically, this increasingly cultural diversity has had to cope with powerful homogenizing instruments of a globalized planet, which supports the awareness that cultural issues cannot be considered apart from power relations.

In education, a recent phenomenon – the teacher research movement – has tried to fight against conservative and dominant forms of teaching and teacher education. For the purpose of understanding and transforming their own practices and promoting educational and social changes, teachers from different parts of the world have conducted research in schools. The vision of developing teacher research as a global movement is increasingly being shared among different people throughout the world.

In this paper, I argued that teacher research, as an international movement, has the potential to become a counter-hegemonic strategy to construct critical teacher education approaches in a globalized world. Hence, this paper intends to contribute to a better understanding of teacher research as a potential counter-hegemonic global movement.

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"Globalizations"

Globalization is typically discussed through the lens of the economy, i.e. globalization of the production of goods and services, and financial markets. Some sociologists prefer, however, to think about the social, political, and cultural dimensions of globalization. In doing so, it becomes difficult to define globalization. As Santos (1997) states, "there is strictly no single entity called globalization; there are, rather, globalizations, and we should use the term only in the plural." (p. 3). Since globalization is a complex phenomenon, we need to specify what we mean by "globalization".

There is no globalization without localization. Nothing is global in the beginning or, in other words, nothing is originally global. Meanwhile, localization is not only local but also global. "Though apparently monolithic, this process does combine highly differentiated situations and conditions, and for that reason it cannot be analyzed independently of the power relations that account for the different forms of time and space mobility." (Santos, 1997, p. 4).

According to Santos, there are different modes of production of globalization, which give rise to distinct forms of globalization. The first one, *globalized localism*, "consists in the process by which a given local phenomenon is successfully globalized." (p. 4). As an example of this form, we have the globalization of American fast food or the transformation of the English into a worldwide language. The second one is called by Santos *localized globalism* which refers to the impact of transnational practices and imperatives on local conditions that are restructured to respond to global realities. Deforestation and massive depletion of natural resources to pay for the foreign debt, and

the ethnicization of the workplace, are considered by Santos as examples of "localized globalism." Third, we have *cosmopolitanism*, which could also be called globalization of subordinate nation-states, regions, classes and social groups or globalization of poor and oppressed people. Cosmopolitan activities involve, among others, transnational feminist, labor and environmental groups.

It is important to realize that the first and second modes are hegemonic forms of globalization while the third one is an example of a counter-hegemonic form of globalization[3]. As indicated by Santos, "the conflicts, resistances, struggles and coalitions clustering around cosmopolitanism (...) show that what we call globalization is in fact a set of arenas of cross-border struggles." (p. 5).

One of the most important issues in this discussion has been the distinction between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic globalization, or between "globalization from above" and "globalization from below." On the one hand, as Santos (1998) points out, "the hegemonic processes of globalization are bringing about the intensification of social exclusion and marginalization of large bodies of population all over the world." (p. 461). On the other hand, against these hegemonic processes of globalization we have had grassroots initiatives, community innovations and popular movements that try to counteract social exclusion, opening up spaces for democratic participation, for community building, and for alternatives to dominant forms of development and knowledge.

According to him, the counter-hegemonic model occurs in rural as well as urban settings, and involves common people. It is, in general, little known because it does not

[3] There is a fourth form of globalization that Santos called the *common heritage of humankind*. The deep seabed, Antarctica, and the Moon are examples of places that cannot be administered privately. Instead, international communities must oversee them.

speak the language of hegemonic globalization. It becomes more apparent after the collapse of the models of grand-scale social transformation. Land rights, urban infrastructure, drinking water, labor rights, gender equality, self-determination, biodiversity, the environment, and community justice are some of the concerns of counter-hegemonic globalization. These movements have had a wide variety of relations with the state – from no relation at all to complementary or confrontational relations.

In education, the teacher research movement has tried to fight against conservative forms of teaching and teacher education. In my opinion, it is important to discuss the characteristics and potentialities of this movement. For instance, is the teacher research a grassroots movement? Does it really have a global character? Is it a counter-hegemonic initiative? What are the limits and possibilities of global and international connections in teacher research and teacher education?

Teacher Research as a Potential Counter-hegemonic Global Movement

Teacher research and other terms such as *educational action research* or *practitioner research* in current use to describe inquiry done on site by school practitioners carry multiple meanings. These different meanings about teacher research have contributed to an increase in misunderstanding of its political stance. A historical review about this concept can help us in understanding these differences.

Defining Teacher Research

According to Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (1994), several terms in current use describe research done on site by school practitioners. The most common ones are

"action research," "teacher research," "practitioner research," "site-based research," "action science," "collaborative action research," "educative research," and "emancipatory praxis." A movement by teacher researchers in North America has adopted the term *teacher research*, a term which has recently been broadened to embrace all school practitioners.

As indicated by Carr and Kemmis (1986), Kurt Lewin coined the phrase 'action research' in the 1940s[4]. According to him,

> "action research consists of analysis, fact-finding and conceptualization about problems; planning of action programs, executing them, and then more fact-finding or evaluation; and then a repetition of this whole circle of activities; indeed, a spiral of such circles. Through the spirals of these activities, action research creates conditions under which learning communities may be established; that is, communities of inquirers committed to learning about and understanding the problems and effects of their own strategic action, and the improvement of this strategic action in practice" (p. 164).

For Lewin, the three important characteristics of modern action research are as follows: "its *participatory* character, its *democratic* impulse, and its *simultaneous contribution to social science and social change*" (p. 164).

Carr and Kemmis (1986) introduce another definition of action research.

> "Action research is simply a form of self-reflection inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (p. 162).

These authors also quote a definition of educational action research elaborated by participants in a seminar in 1981[5].

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[4] The authors cite two of his works: 'LEWIN, K. (1946) Action research and minority problems, Journal of Social Issues, vol. 2, pp. 34-6.' and 'LEWIN, K. (1952) Group decisions and social change, in SWANSON. G.E., NEWCOMB, T.M. and HARTLEY, F.E., (Eds) Readings in Social Psychology, New York, Holt.'

[5] They refer to the National Invitational Seminar on Action Research held at Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria (Australia) in May 1981.

> "Educational research is a term used to describe a family of activities in curriculum development, professional development, school improvement programs, and systems planning and policy development. These activities have in common the identification of strategies of planned action which are *implemented*, and them systematically submitted to *observation, reflection and change.* Participants in the action being considered are integrally involved in all of these activities" (pp. 164-165).

Even though using different terms, other authors have also provided definitions for research done in schools. For instance, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) define *teacher research* as a "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work." (p. 23-24). According to them, "teacher research is concerned with the questions that arise from the lived experiences of teachers and the everyday life of teaching expressed in a language that emanates from practice." (p. 59).

McKernan (1988) defines *practitioner research* as "a form of self-reflective problem solving which enables practitioners to better understand and solve pressing problems in social settings." (p. 6) (cited in Anderson, Herr and Nihlen 1994, p. 3).

McCutcheon and Jung (1990) furnish us with the following definition:

> "...systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry. The goals of such research are the understanding of practice and the articulation of a rationale or philosophy of practice in order to improve practice." (p. 148) (cited in Anderson, Herr and Nihlen 1994, p. 3).

According to Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (1994), "in basic terms, *practitioner research* is "insider" research done by practitioners using their own site (classroom, institution, school district, community) as the focus of their study." (p. 2).

Hence, *teacher research* and the other terms in current use have multiple meanings. From Susan Noffke's point of view, "what we need to look for is NOT whose version of action research is THE correct one, but rather, what it is that needs to be done,

and how action research can further those aims." (cited in Hollingsworth 1997, p. 312). According to her, "its 'potential' cannot be judged apart from the 'ideological' bases which drives its practices, as well as the material context."

In the next part of this paper, I will summarize the historical process through which the teacher research idea was constructed. In addition, I will present in the next paragraphs the origins of the current teacher research movement.

A Brief History of the Teacher Research Movement

In Anderson, Herr and Nihlen's book, *Studying your own school: an educator's guide to qualitative practitioner research*, we can find a historical review about the conception of practitioner research and educational action research. According to the authors, "the idea of educational practitioners doing research in schools goes back at least as far as the late 19th and early 20th century, with the movement for the scientific study of education." (p. 10). However, within the scientific movement in education, "teachers were allocated the role of carrying out research in their classrooms that was designed by university researchers." (p. 10). According to the authors, this movement conceived of teachers as mere gatherers of data that could be analyzed statistically. As it is known, the hierarchical relation between universities and schools, reflected in most of this early work on practitioner research, continues to be a source of tension today. As stated by Zeichner (2000), "teachers have traditionally been seen primarily as subjects or consumers of research done by others."

Overlapping the movement for the scientific study of education was the progressive movement inspired by John Dewey. As indicated by Anderson, Herr and

Nihlen (1994), "Dewey's work is the inspiration of much of the current writing on the "reflective practitioner" (Schon, 1983), which has helped us better understand how school practitioners make sense of their experiences and engage in professional learning." (p. 11).

Many scholars believe that *action research* stemmed from the work of social psychologist Kurt Lewin and the group-dynamics movement of the 1940s (Anderson, Herr and Nihlen 1994; Zeichner 2001; Zeichner and Nofke 2000):

> "Although Lewin was not the first to use action research, he was the first to develop a theory of action research that made it a respectable form of research in the social sciences. Lewin believed that knowledge should be created from problem solving in real-live situations." (Anderson, Herr and Nihlen 1994, p. 11).

Action research was promoted during the early 1950s in the educational area principally by Stephen Corey, Dean of Columbia Teachers College (Anderson, Herr and Nihlen 1994; Zeichner 2001; Zeichner and Noffke 2000). "Corey believed that teachers would likely find the results of their own research more useful than that of outsiders, and thus would be more likely to question current curricular practices." (Anderson, Herr and Nihlen 1994, p. 13).

In the 1950s, however, action research was ridiculed by traditional educational researchers and judged according to positivist standards. As indicated by Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (1994), by the end of the 1950s, action research had declined not only in the field of education, but in the social sciences as well. Interest in action research waned during the 1960s, though it never totally disappeared.

A teacher research movement – the *teacher-as-researchers movement* – began in Great Britain during the late 1960s. The work of Lawrence Stenhouse is usually credited with renewing interest in action research in Britain:

> "The heyday of action research in Great Britain saw a teacher research movement develop in the schools as well as a series of large, state-founded collaborative action research projects. During the 1970s and 1980s, a lively debate took place in Great Britain over a number of issues in action research." (Anderson, Herr and Nihlen 1994, p. 15).

As indicated by Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (1994), one of the most interesting critiques was that of feminist action researchers, who argued that action research was losing its "emancipatory" potential. In the feminists' opinion, "the radical potential of action research is lost when it is turned into a recipe and controlled by state agencies." (p. 15).

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, a model of action research based upon Paulo Freire's ideas was taking hold in Latin America. According to Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (1994), during the last two decades, this type of research, now more commonly called *participatory research*, has been done all over Latin America and the rest of the Third World. (p. 16). As indicated by Zeichner (2001):

> "Some of the most ambitious work in educational action research today is being done in developing countries in Latin America and Africa. For example, in Namibia, action research has been used since independence in 1990 as a major strategy in a comprehensive educational reform program that has sought to transform teaching and teacher education from autocratic to more learned-centered forms." (p. 24).

The Landless Workers Movement (MST), the biggest grassroots movement which has struggled for agrarian reform and social justice in Brazil since the early 1980s, has also tried to implement an ambitious *participatory research* project in a number of schools in rural areas, settlements and encampments (Caldart 1997, 2000).

Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (1994), based upon Schutter and Yopo (1981), describe the following as general characteristics of *participatory research*:

- "The point of departure for participatory research is a vision of social events as contextualized by macrolevel social forces.
- Social process and structures are understood within a historical context.
- Theory and practice are integrated.
- The subject-object relationship is transformed into a subject-subject relationship through dialogue.
- Research and action (including education itself) become a single process.
- The community and researcher together produce critical knowledge aimed at social transformation.
- The results of research are immediately applied to a concrete situation." (p. 17).

According to Anderson, Herr and Nihlen, "in Freirean-inspired participatory research, the academic research model is challenged at almost every point. The dualism of theory and practice, subject and object, research and teaching, are collapsed." (p. 17). In addition, *participatory research* also contests many of the presuppositions of more traditional models of action research. "Traditional action research tends to emphasize issues of efficiency and improvement of practices, whereas participatory research is concerned with equity, self-reliance, and oppression problems."

The work of John Elliot and Clem Adelman in Britain was responsible for the resurgence of interest in action research in the 1970s. The Ford Teaching Project (1973-76) "involved teachers in collaborative action research into their own practices, and its central notion of the 'self-monitoring teacher' was based on Lawrence Stenhouse's views of the teacher as a researcher and as an 'extended professional' (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 166). According to the authors, "a range of practices have been studied by educational action researchers and some examples may suffice to show how they have used action research to improve their practices, their understandings of these practices, and the situations in which they work" (p. 167). They cite some projects in Australia which involved action research not only by teachers but also by students.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Stephen Kemmis led an academic group that was concerned with moving action research beyond narrow pragmatism and planned interventions by external agencies. The Australian group challenged older models of action research as essentially conservative and positivistic. According to this group "as action research becomes more methodologically sophisticated and technically proficient, it will lose its critical edge." (Anderson, Herr and Nihlen 1994, p. 16).

Kemmis and Grundy (1997) compare the emergence of Australian action research with its counterparts in Britain, continental Europe and the United States:

> "It is important to note that Australian educational action research emerged as distinct from its counterparts in Britain, continental Europe and the United States of America. British action research in the 1970s shared with Australian action research the participatory and collaborative style of work, but was less strategically-oriented and probably less politically aware. It emphasized interpretative inquiry where Australian action research was more critical. Continental European action research shared a similar critical perspective with Australian action research, but did not appear to have developed the same practical thrust of the Australian work, and American action research developed as more teacher-oriented and teacher-controlled." (p. 40).

Finally, in fact, the renewal of interest in teacher research and other forms of practitioner inquiry in the U.S. had, and continues to have, according to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), a distinctly grassroots character.

As stated by Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (1994), even though the teacher research movement in the United States took place later than in Latin America and Britain, "it was not derivative of either movement, nor was it a reappropriation of the North America action research movement of the 1940s and 1950s." (p. 19-20). The authors point out six conditions that could explain the emergence of the teacher research movement in the U.S.: 1) From the late 1960s, qualitative research has challenged traditional forms of research in education, helping to open the door for inquiry done by teachers; 2) The

increase in collaborative research, in which teachers are invited to work alongside experts in improving practices, has also aided the promotion of teacher research; 3) From the work of Donald Schon, the connection between practitioner research and the notion of professionalization has become clearer; 4) Teachers' commitment to writing led the way to publishing accounts of their experiences as teacher researchers; 5) Many university teacher education programs began to highlight teacher research; and 6) The school restructuring movement has more recently begun to propose restructuring schools to create conditions that nurture teacher inquiry and reflection. (pp. 20-22).

Furthermore, Anderson and Herr (1999) indicate other factors that are contributing to the growth of the teacher research movement in the United States:

> "Increasingly K-12 practitioners have masters degrees and in some cases doctorates. Site-based management in some schools is opening up spaces and resources for teachers to meet together to do collaborative action research and form teacher study groups, and increasingly the results of such work are finding their way into print. Several refereed journals now exist that publish practitioner research and a plethora of edited books of practitioner research have recently appeared. Although still rare, journals are publishing practitioner research." (p. 13).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) direct our attention to great variations within the teacher research movement in the U. S. As stated by them, it "is not a monolith." (p. 22). Consequently, it becomes "difficult at times to distinguish among underlying ideologies that lead to genuine restructuring of roles and workplaces and those that leave the cultures of classrooms, schools, and universities fundamentally unchanged." (p. 17). According to them, the increase of this movement yields a paradox: "it is in danger of becoming anything and everything." (p. 17). In terms of the future of the movement, the authors share with groups previously referenced a similar concern about the risk of losing its critical and emancipatory characteristics.

Therefore, although influenced by different types of movements, in distinct historical moments, the current teacher research movement has its own features. The primary characteristics of this movement will be presented in the following section.

Primary Characteristics of the Current Teacher Research Movement

Since I presented both some definitions and a historical review, I have already introduced some characteristics of the current teacher research movement. In this part of the paper, I shall connect primary features of the movement with some questions raised earlier in this paper: Is the current teacher research a global movement? Is it a counter-hegemonic initiative?

Initially, it seems clear that whenever we talk about the current teacher research movement, we are speaking about an increasingly international movement. The vision of developing teacher research as a global movement is increasingly being shared among different people throughout the world. For instance, in a book edited by Hollingsworth (1997) there is evidence that educational action research has taken place in different countries around the world, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Malaysia, Australia, Canada, Mexico, Austria, Italy, Israel and so forth. Also, other publications point to it as a de facto expanding worldwide phenomenon. As indicated by Zeichner (1994):

> "...this international movement [he refers to the reflective practice movement] that has developed in teaching and teacher education under the banner of reflection can be seen as a reaction against a view of teachers as technicians who merely carry out what others, removed from the classroom, want

them to do, a reject of top-down forms of educational reform that involve teachers merely as passive participants." (p. 10).

Therefore, it is true that the teacher research movement has extended its reach over the globe. For the purpose of understanding and transforming their own practice, promoting educational and social changes, teachers from different parts of the world have done research in schools. However, people who agree with this increasing global character of teacher research have not had the same opinion about limits and potentialities of this educational phenomenon.

On one side, some people believe that this development of teacher research throughout the world is a result of the role of international financial institutions such as, the World Bank, in the promotion of conservative reforms in teacher education programs, especially in developing countries. As I indicated before, these conservative international organizations have recently co-opted the discourse of teacher research in order to keep their control over teacher education programs.

In this way, the view of teaching as a form of educational inquiry has just entailed an intensification of teachers' work. As stated by Apple (1993), one of the negative effects of the conservative restoration in education is the deskilling and the degradation of teacher's labor. Besides lower salaries and less respect, teachers have been losing their control over their own work. Their autonomy has been reduced. Consequently, it is essential to emphasize that it is impossible to talk about teacher research without discussing issues of teachers' working conditions and professional qualifications. As it is known, there are wide differences between richer and poorer countries in terms of teachers' working conditions and professional qualifications. As a global phenomenon,

teacher research can become a movement that also struggles for better working conditions and higher professional qualifications for teachers in the whole world.

On the other side, some researchers praise the potential for teacher research "to become a truly grassroots and democratic movement of knowledge production and educational and social changes" (Anderson, Herr and Nihlen 1994. p. 23), which can lead it toward a counter-hegemonic global phenomenon. According to Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (1994):

> "Many see practitioner research as a social movement in which practitioners are attempting to assert their own ways of knowing educational and organizational process as valid knowledge. In postmodern terms, the knowledge of educational practitioners, along with the knowledge of other marginalized groups like women, the poor, and some ethnic and racial groups, is subjugated knowledge." (p. 42).

As indicated by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), "taken seriously, teacher research represents a radical challenge to assumptions about the relationships of theory and practice, school and university partnerships, and school structures and educational reform." (p. 23). They believe that teacher research "has the potential to redefine the notion of a knowledge base for teaching and to challenge the university's hegemony in the generation of expert knowledge and curriculum." (p. xiv).

Moreover, the authors state that "the unique feature of the questions that prompt teacher research is that they emanate from neither theory nor practice alone but from critical reflection on the intersection of the two." (p. 15). They argue that "when teachers do research, the gap between researcher and researched is narrowed. Notions of research subjectivity and objectivity are redefined: Subjective and local knowing rather than objectified and distanced "truth" is the goal." (p. 58).

Bissex and Bullock (1987) also state that teacher research is a natural agent of change: "Doing classroom research changes teachers and the teaching profession from the inside out, from the bottom up, through changes in teachers themselves. And therein lies the power." (cited in Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993, p. 22).

Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (1994) agree with the points of view indicated above. In their words:

> "As school practitioners become more active in sharing their work and practitioner research becomes a broad-based movement, practitioner research has the potential to reject the dualistic hierarchies of university and school, knowledge and action, theory and practice." (p. 23).

In addition, Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (1994) defend the idea that students and parents, the most oppressed groups in terms of school systems, have to be included in teachers' inquiries. In their words:

> "Although educational practitioners may rightly feel oppressed in their work conditions, the most oppressed groups are students, who are relatively powerless organizational members, and poor and minority parents, whose children live in marginalized communities.
>
> For this reason, practitioners are advised to include students and parents in their research whenever possible and should be willing to submit their own cherished beliefs (even "progressive" ones) to examination when their students and communities question them." (p. 43)

Obviously, teacher research has faced many barriers to become established in school systems. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), four of the most important obstacles to teacher research in the U.S. are teacher isolation, occupational socialization, the knowledge base for teaching, and the reputation of educational research:

> "Because many structural features of school systems constrain bottom-up, inside-out reform, it seems unlikely that school systems traditionally organized to facilitate top-down change will readily acknowledge and build on the potential impact of teacher-initiated reforms." (p. 22).

Even though the implementation of teacher research is a difficult task, it is not impossible. Apple and Beane (1995), through four experiences of *democratic schools* in the United States, demonstrate the potentiality of bottom-up reforms:

> "(...)In none of the cases was the impetus generated from the "top". Instead, bottom-up movements – groups of teachers, the community, social activists, and so on – provided the driving force for change. Finally, none of the reforms was driven by a technical, achievement-at-all-costs vision. Instead, each was linked to a broadly defined set of values that was put into practice: enhancing participation at the grass roots and in the school, empowering individuals and groups who had heretofore been largely silenced, creating new ways of linking the real world and real social problems with the school so that the school is integrally connected to the experiences of people in their daily lives." (p. 23).

Therefore, as teacher research has simultaneously taken place in several countries throughout the world, it seems that research done in schools has increasingly assumed a global character. As it has been undertaken by oppressed people in some situations, a potential characteristics of the teacher research movement is that it could develop into a counter-hegemonic phenomenon.

Finally, in spite of the attempt of conservative international organizations to appropriate its discourse, I really believe that the teacher research movement has a potential to become a strategy to overcome traditional teacher education approaches. Because it is a bottom-up movement that has extended its reach over the globe, it is possible to imagine communities of teacher researchers and networks of individuals from different parts of the world, sharing their experiences, struggling for better working conditions and higher professional qualifications and trying to create collective as well as collaborative and emancipatory teacher education alternatives.

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