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for Capacity Building in Africa

# CPI

## Critical Practitioner Inquiry

### NEWSLETTER

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## Message from Dr. Joseph Ngu

Deputy Director and Officer in Charge, UNESCO-IICBA

Dear CPI community,

As you all know, we successfully completed the first year of the M.Ed. in Critical Practitioner Inquiry, known for short as CPI programme. The CPI programme is part of the UNESCO-IICBA's initiatives of training and upgrading teacher educators through the distance mode. It is a Masters of Education programme developed and implemented through collaboration between the Umea University (Sweden) and UNESCO-IICBA. The programme officially began in Addis Ababa/Ethiopia in May 2003.

The CPI programme follows the theoretical and practical experiences of the Namibian Teacher Education Reform Project. It is expected to enable teacher educators to analyze what is happening in their classrooms, examine what official policies are and to improve their practices. These knowledge and skills, in turn, are expected to be transferred to their students in teacher education programs. In other words, the CPI-trained teacher educators are supposed to have high degree of multiplying effects at their respective education levels. That is their skills are expected to impact their teaching at faster rates than conventional teaching methods.

Currently, there are 27 CPI students from six federal universities of Ethiopia. These Universities and the corresponding number of students are the following:

1. Addis Ababa University	3
2. Alemaya University	7
3. Bahir Dar university	5
4. Debub University	6
5. Mekelle University	5
6. Jimma University	1

These students, together with their National Tutors and International Tutors as well as UNESCO-IICBA staff, have passed through two National Institutes, one Regional Institute, and four Regional Cluster Seminars. All these academic and research forums were conducted as part of the on-going M.Ed. programme and were highly successful. As a result of these forums, the students have now reached at a stage of writing their CPI theses, the proposals of which have already been approved during the first Regional Institute organized throughout the above-mentioned six universities during 1-10 March, 2004.

Finally, I would like to congratulate you for reaching the stage of publishing the first CPI Newsletter. This Newsletter is supposed to be a forum for exchanging ideas and experiences about CPI in different Universities worldwide. In this first edition of the Newsletter Lars Dahlstrom writes on the concept of CPI, which enables teacher educators to analyze what is happening in the classroom and how to improve their practices. Temechegn Engida writes on practitioner/action research carried out by teachers themselves on theories and practices of teaching they have been using. The third article is by a student of the program, Kedir Asefa who reports on his experiences at the Alemaya University. He underscores the benefits attained since coming on board the CPI programme.

It is my wish that both the CPI programme and the Newsletter will mature and attract pedagogical experts and practitioners in the field of teacher education.

Bon courage

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# Critical Practitioner Inquiry – working against the grain

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The concept Critical Practitioner Inquiry (CPI) was born in Africa. It was first used as part of the post-apartheid education reforms in Namibia in mid 1990s but can be traced back to the educational practices that developed as part of the liberation struggles in Southern Africa and internationally in the 1970s and 1980s that intended to show that education can make a difference. Today, when all walks of life, including education, are influenced by neo-liberal agendas CPI stands out as a counter-hegemonic force in pursuit of a broader social justice and a challenge to the self-appointed preferential right of interpretation over educational practice by external groups like traditional academics, evaluation consultants, and economists.

The vision of CPI is based on two broad assumptions that together form the socio-political and philosophic platform for an emancipatory educational practice. The first assumption is that social conditions are constructed by people and can therefore also be reconstructed by people. The second assumption is that educational practitioners have to capture the power to exercise their preferential right of interpretation over their own practice to avoid that they become victims of external interests and forces that want to dictate the conditions for and performances of educators.

The Master course titled *Critical Practitioner Inquiry for Educators* is developed by IICBA and the Department of Education, Umeå University, Sweden. The platform of the course is elaborated in a position paper.<sup>1</sup>

## The platform

The position paper starts in a critical analysis of global trends that are significant also to the way education is perceived and practiced. A reflection over the effects of modern education systems is made from the fact that half of the population on the globe, i.e. 3 billion people, are rural and survives mainly from agriculture and animal husbandry activities in social circumstances that to a large extent can be characterised as traditional and that modern schooling seems to take very little notice of that. Modern schooling is rather

an illusive creation of opportunity for all to become part of modernisation and a type of life that is dictated by competitive marketisations and individualism under the guise of freedom of choice. While the social effects of this development are becoming more and more obvious in all parts of the world in the form of enlarged strata of poverty, education is still looked upon as one of the few short cuts for parents and learners amongst the already marginalised people in third world countries to become part of a future modernisation.

Instead of contributing to a betterment of rural life this process draws young people into the margins of urban enclaves that further accelerates the impoverishment of rural areas and the creation of modern urban slums that the sociologist Manuel Castells calls the black holes of the fourth world.<sup>2</sup> From this perspective we can say that modern schooling contributes to a destructive development.

The information highways of modern technology adds fuel to this development as it facilitates information access that in principle runs from the global centres in the North towards the peripheral South, from urban to rural areas, and from corporate interests to consumers. The hegemonic conception of a certain way of life characterised by consumption, individualism, and competition is spreading as the only future to strive for destroying what historically has been built up through social welfare systems, acts of solidarity, and collective efforts. Some critical scholars mean that we will better understand the recent global developments if we replace the present and commonly used analytical concept – globalisation – with that of formal and informal imperialism.<sup>3</sup>

The future for countries at the margins is found in the non-acceptance of the rules dictated on a global scale by corporate powers and their acronym imperial counterparts WB (World Bank), WTO (World Trade Organisation), and IMF (International Monetary Fund), and in the reconstruction of educational practices along lines that are more sensitive to local needs and possibilities for a less disruptive development as an alternative

to the present imitative trends. A new platform needs to be created for such a process to start, which contributes to a critical and analytical perspective on social development and education that goes beyond the taken for granted. The CPI approach is an attempt in that direction.

## The CPI approach

Critical Practitioner Inquiry (CPI) is developed as an approach that can create a foundation for a different educational practice. The CPI approach as a combination of inquiries and development work focuses on the inquirers' own practice. The approach utilizes experiences and practices developed within the educational fields of action research, reflective practice, social constructivism, and critical theory. In short, it starts in contextual analysis and moves on to reflective practice and reconstructed understanding that is made official and shared through a documented knowledge base.



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exchange of ideas  
among the CPI community.  
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A *focal point* is identified at an early stage. The focal point is identified based on a genuine concern by the practitioner to improve his/her practice. However, the practitioner's initial focal point will often be modified due to the continuous inquiries and dialogue with tutors and critical friends as part of the process to emancipate educational thinking and understanding from the taken for granted. This process can at times be problematic as we all have a tendency to stick to and feel comfortable with our old ways of thinking and doing.

The *contextual analysis* is threefold. It includes analysis of practice, meaning that the practitioner looks into his/her own practice with critical eyes to find out about weaknesses and possibilities. Critical friends, who in this course are colleagues from the same institution, can at times be very helpful in the analysis of practice. The contextual analysis includes analyses of policy as a way to identify degrees of freedom for action, external influences on policy that in countries dependent on the financial goodwill of donors is a highly significant aspect of educational policy, and the official as well as taken for granted intentions with education in a given society. The third leg of contextual analysis is the development of a scholastic perspective that will assist the practitioners in their inquiries with the aim to move away from a culture of blame and create a reflective position towards their own practice. The development of the scholastic perspective is mainly done through literature studies and related assignments that will be integrated into the students' master theses.

The practitioners/course participants carry out a practical attempt to *change their own practice* based on the focal point and their inquiry plan. Parallel data collections are carried out that are followed by another critical analysis based on the different parts of the inquiry process with the aim to identify and problematize reconstructed practice and reconstructed understandings of that practice.

The course participants will *share* their experiences and findings with each other at the end of the first CPI cycle, which is also the official end of the course. Through this course the participants have carried out development work that has changed their own practice as well as their understanding of that practice

through a CPI approach based on a chosen focal point. The CPI approach should not be buried or shelved at this point but used continuously for educational development based on a new focal point or by developing even further the focal point used in the first cycle from new and advanced contextual analyses. The CPI approach should not be restricted to academic courses even though it is introduced that way. The intention is that course participants will continue to use and to develop CPI approaches locally as part of their normal duties in their attempts to forward their preferential rights of interpretation amongst themselves and their colleagues within the field of education. By this, the position of practitioners will become stronger and move away from what many outsiders would like them to be, mute technical implementers of others' ideas and instructions that downgrade practitioners' status in society.

As such, Critical Practitioner Inquiry has an extended ambition beyond formal academic course boundaries that is often left behind or not given any serious attention. Practitioners must start to share their experiences from systematic inquiries into their practice on a broader scale if their preferential right of interpretation is ever going to be acknowledged outside their own ranks. This is supported by the establishment of an official and written *knowledge base* from inquiries carried out through CPI and similar approaches. Even though scholastic rigor and fidelity in the construction of shared meanings also apply to CPI it does not imply that traditional academic models need to or should be imitated. It rather encourages that new avenues are opened to share experiences and analysis from systematic inquiries. The CPI theses that the participants in this course will develop will also be published and presented at a conference after the course is finished for the purpose of sharing the information and to establish the said knowledge base more officially.

## Experiences so far

The CPI course is still in its beginning and it is too early to try to evaluate what has been done so far as it is at the beginning of a process that for many of the participants is part of a new experience. It is not only the methodological aspects of CPI that challenges old ways of thinking. The structure with national and regional

meeting places and a combination of international and national tutors is part of a new way to organise in-service/distance education in a situation where modern communication technology is scarce and infant communication systems are vulnerable and not capable to replace the social aspects of education. Further on, the course content is not presented in a way that commonly is associated with distance and in-service courses in the form of ready-made and highly structured material. If we add to this, that the participants initial plans for their CPI inquiries to a large extent followed rather traditional academic patterns, we can only conclude that the course is facing a rather interesting future that could be characterised as the beginning of a paradigm shift. The challenges ahead and the promising future can be illustrated by some of the comments made by the participants after the first and second national institutes as examples of both general and more specific appraisals of the course so far. After the first national institute some students expressed the following views:

For more reasons than one I developed a kind of xenophobia towards Europeans and everything European. I thought that all educated white were and still are behind the hegemonic philosophy of cultural universalism of the northern political order. But the accounts of such scholars as / *the ones involved in this course/* show me that there are staunch supporters of the Southern cause in the northern block. This group of scholars, knowing the North from within are playing a sacred role in the struggle to counter northern monopolism and hegemonism. This is because they not only uncover the evil nature of the northern political order but also indicate the ways to struggle against it.

At the beginning there was worry about introduction of CPI. I think my worry was related to my previous background. My expectation was that the international tutors were to give a ready-made introduction about CPI. But our tutors guided me to discover more introductions about CPI through group work and

readings. At last, I found the first national Institute to be successful to introduce CPI.

By giving me pondering time, the first national institute allowed me to work something out for myself. From the discussion and the technique you followed I have developed interest in learning to do things for myself. I also came to realise that practice is necessary for both consolidating learning and gaining skills.

The examples you raised were good but I could not see any tangible aspect so that I can introduce it to the situation here. The Namibian case is an example still I don't appreciate them as to how they are useful to my situation here.

After the second national institute some students made the following comments:

Previously it seemed to me difficult to be a critical practitioner as the concept is new to our context. However, now things are becoming clear to me as of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Institute. I have been passively and critically implementing whatever comes from above. I am not as such questioning or analysing my own practices as well as the country's education policy. Maybe, I am not this much empowered to do this. In other words, I lacked the practice and experiences of how to improve one's own educational practice or policy. As a result, for all the educational failures poor teachers like me are always blamed and demoralised.

But now I am at least aware of the ways to improve my own classroom practice. All the presentations and discussions I had with you (the

international tutors) plus with the program participants empowered me how to do things for the better of the country as a whole and for the improvement of my own situation. In particular I have got the way to be a change agent i.e. via CPI approach.

By the way from CPI not only "new knowledge", "new educational approach" that I am learning but also how I can struggle and fight systematically and give my voice so that the good and the better to happen for my people and my country. Especially, I don't forget how you defined CPI in this 2<sup>nd</sup> National Institute. It is this: "CPI is about making voices heard. If there is no arena for the subaltern voices – create one!"

A colleague of mine wrote not so long ago that teachers work against the grain and that teaching is a risky undertaking.<sup>4</sup> He reminded us that teachers could never be sure about the outcome of their efforts. This philosophical pondering of what teachers do and what teaching is was based on the contradictions that are found in all teaching e.g. between the emancipation of the learner as the intension of education and the instructional position of the teacher that leads on to questions like: When does the instructional position of the teacher become oppressive? When is teaching liberating and emancipating? When such questions come up we tend to turn to the taken for granted and find an avoiding answer like: we have come to an agreement based on a long experience of schooling that the syllabus should contain a certain content. We treat such questions very seldom with the seriousness they deserve and as a way to develop a *critical literacy of pedagogy* including the interrelated levels of questions that should guide curriculum work and practice in the following order of priority and importance:<sup>5</sup>

Level 1. Why knowledge to? (Why should we teach certain constitutional and dispositional values in school, like being honest, being empathic, embracing a feeling of solidarity?)

Level 2. Why knowledge how? (With these constitutional and dispositional values in mind how should we carry out schooling to develop them?)

Level 3. Why knowledge that? (And lastly, on what content should we teach these constitutional and dispositional values?)

There is a tendency to avoid the troublesome connections between these levels of a critical literacy of pedagogy. Even though we will find broad constitutional and dispositional aims in most steering documents they seem to live their own life or have for long left the educational discourse and concerns the closer we come to more specific syllabus instructions and practice. In the practical teaching and learning situation it is 'knowledge that', the lowest level of concern of a critical literacy of pedagogy that reigns with the common result that education is reduced to a matter of reproducing isolated entities of facts in the day-to-day process of schooling. As a consequence, 'knowledge that' becomes the only measure of failure or success of both the individual learners and the system as a whole through controlling examination systems. CPI is an attempt to reverse this tendency and to establish a different educational practice where the levels of a critical literacy of pedagogy that today are marginalised in the mainstream views and practices of neo-liberal expansion into educational systems worldwide, are given a more prominent and central position. It is in this sense that CPI is working against the grain to show that education can make a difference for life both inside and outside educational institutions.

<sup>1</sup> The position paper was introduced and discussed during the 1<sup>st</sup> National Institute. Dahlström, Lars (2003) Position Paper Masters' Degree: Critical Practitioner Inquiry for Educators. Department of Education, Umeå University, Sweden.

<sup>2</sup> Manuel Castells has recently written three rather influential volumes under the general title: The information age: Economy, Society and Culture, where he analyses the recent global developments. These are: Castells, Manuel (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society*. Volume I. Blackwell Publishers; Castells, Manuel (1997) *The Power of Identity*. Volume II. Blackwell Publishers; Castells, Manuel (1998) *End of Millennium*. Volume III. Blackwell Publishers. Castells writing on the black holes of the fourth world is found in Volume III.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Amin, Samir (2003) World Poverty, Pauperization, & Capital Accumulation. *Monthly Review*. Vol. 55. No. 5; Foster, John Bellamy (2003) Imperial America and War. *Monthly Review*. Vol. 55. No. 1.

<sup>4</sup> This was written in 2001 by Professor David Hamilton at the Department of Education, Umeå University, in his preface to a book by Nicholas Beattie on the versions of educational progressivism in France, Italy and Germany based on the ideas of the French educationalist Celestin Freinet.

<sup>5</sup> Based on Dahlström, Lars (2002) *Post-apartheid teacher education reform in Namibia – the struggle between common sense and good sense*. Department of Education, Umeå University.

# Critical Issues in Practitioner/Action Research\*

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## I. Introduction

Kurt Lewin (1948), one of the founding figures of action research, remarked that research that produced nothing but books is inadequate (in Cohen, et al., 2000). Mere empirical testing and understanding as the positivists do and mere interpretative research paradigms are not sufficient in handling actual educational problems. Action/practitioner research, on the other hand, has become a powerful tool for change and improvement.

There are several terms used to 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,” “participatory action research,” “educative research,” and “emancipatory praxis.” As Anderson, et al (1994) point out, although each of these terms represents different research traditions that grew out of very different social contexts, this paper uses both practitioner research and action research interchangeably.

Practitioner/action research provides opportunities in conducting inquiry-based research in one’s own classroom, school or educational setting with the objective of developing a plan of action. McKeman (quoted in Anderson, et al., 1994) describes practitioner research as a form of self-reflective problem solving, which enables practitioners to better understand and solve pressing problems in social setting.

Practitioner research is characterized as “insider” research done by practitioners (in this case, those working in educational setting) using their own site (classroom, institution, school district, community) as the focus of their study (Ibid). Cohen and Manion (in Cohen, et al., 2000) define action research as a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention. It is a reflective process, but is different

from isolated, spontaneous reflection in that it is deliberately and systematically undertaken, and generally requires that some form of evidence be presented to support assertions. What constitutes “evidence” or, in more traditional terms, “data,” is still being debated.

VALRC (2003) recognizes practitioner research as an important vehicle for staff development. As such practitioner research provides participants with the structure and the encouragement to systematically conduct inquiry about their teaching and learning, to reflect on the findings, and to make changes in their practice or program. Furthermore, practitioner research serves as good professional practice:

- to question what is happening in classrooms and programs,
- to try out new strategies and innovations, and
- to make informed decisions for taking action in the future.

The term practitioner, in this context, is used to denote anyone working in formal education, including teachers/instructors, heads of subject departments, principals, vice-principals, and tutors (if any). Practitioner research is for new and experienced educators who want the opportunity to think critically and to speak openly about problems related to teaching and learning that have been challenging them.

## II. Characteristics and Principles of Practitioner Research

According to Schmuck (1997) action/practitioner research is to study a real school situation with a view to improve the quality of actions and results within it. Whitehead (1993) also argues that action research is carried out “on-the-job”, unlike more traditional forms of educational and classroom research. The most important question that action

researchers ask is “How do I improve what I am doing?” The context in which the action researcher is part and parcel is the primary focus for the problem, for the actual intervention practices, and for benefiting immediately from the impacts of the interventions.

Reflection and action are two sides of the same coin in the action research paradigm. According to Schmuck (1997: 7) teachers can integrate reflection with action by using Schmuck and Runkel’s STP concepts shown in the following diagram.

In the STP problem solving paradigms, S stands for the current situation or the state of affairs that exists in here and now. T stands for the targets one strives to reach in the future. P stands for the path, plan, procedure, project, or proposal that could move from the current S to the future. “As teachers collect data or implement

\* Part of this paper was presented during the first Regional Cluster Seminar in Addis Ababa University and Mekelle University center, as well as during the second National Institute of the M.Ed. in CPI programme.

alternative practices, they should keep things straight by continuously sorting out what the current situation is, what targets they are moving toward, and what new practices will help them move there” (Ibid.).

It is the writer of this paper opinion that, although the diagram presents the action/reflection of the practitioner in a linear manner from S through P to T, the critical practitioner has to go back and forth through the inquiry process at the stage of P. At P the critical practitioner needs to:

- keep a journal/portfolio of his/her activities and interventions,
- examine the kind and extent of improvement he/she has made,
- reflect on what can be learnt from the recently made intervention and its results,
- discuss with colleagues for possible large-scale interventions at school level, as the context involves not only the practitioner but also students, at least, etc.

Of course, there must be a change in the direction of the target as a result of action research. As Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) argue, the principal features of an action research approach are change (action) or collaboration between researchers and researched. Action researchers are concerned to improve a situation through active intervention and in collaboration with parties involved.

What is important at this point, however, is that action research as a research method is cyclical (Noffke, 1995). In other words, it does not progress from an initial question to the formulation of data collection, analysis, and conclusion. Rather, Noffke adds,

*“it assumes that understandings and actions emerge in a constant cycle, one that always highlights the ways in which educators are partially correct, yet in continual need of revision, in their thoughts and actions. The process does not end, as with traditional notions of research, with richer understandings of education for others to implement; rather it aids in the ongoing process of identifying contradictions, which, in turn, help to locate spaces for ethically defensible, politically strategic action”* (pp. 4-5).

The following principles of practitioner research are synthesized from works of various researchers and theoreticians such as VALRC (2003), Anderson, et al (1994), Cohen, et al. (2000).

### **1. Practitioners conduct informal research all the time.**

In the process of their day-to-day activities, practitioners conduct informal research. They think about why some instructional activities work better than others, how to reach certain students, how students learn certain subjects, or why some students learn faster than others. Practitioner research as staff development thus formalizes the process of informal research conducted by practitioners.

### **2. Practitioner research differs from academic research**

Although practitioner research can borrow appropriate methods from academic research, it is fundamentally different from academic research in that it represents *insider or local knowledge about a setting*. Practitioner research focuses on concerns that participants raise about *their own practice*. They identify the problem or issue to study and what questions to investigate in their own classroom or program. They decide how to conduct their research and what the appropriate purpose or outcomes might be, given the constraints or demands of their working contexts. Most practitioner research is oriented to some action or cycle of actions that practitioners wish to take to address a particular situation.

### **3. Practitioner research is a long-term learning process.**

It occurs over several months within a supportive group and as the practitioners carry out their individual investigations. Participants become members of a learning community that develops along with their research projects. In a practitioner research network, participants have the opportunity to share their research as it unfolds, to focus on individual and group concerns, and to create strategies for dealing with issues at various stages of the research.

### **4. Practitioner research is political**

No research is neutral; therefore, researchers should not be naïve about

how their research will be received within their setting. Although practitioner researchers need techniques for gathering and analyzing data, they also need an understanding of the ways in which practitioner research often threatens the vested interests and ideological commitments of some groups and individuals, particularly in their own immediate context.

### **5. Practitioner research is value laden.**

Like all forms of inquiry, practitioner research is value laden. Although most practitioners hope that practitioner research will improve their practice, what constitutes “improvement” is not self-evident. It is particularly problematic in a field such as education, where there is no consensus on basic educational aims. Practitioner research takes place in educational settings that reflect a society characterized by conflicting values and an unequal distribution of resources and power.

### **6. Practitioner research is best done in collaboration with others.**

Some educators argue that practitioner research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation, such as other educational practitioners in the setting, students, parents, or other members of the community. Sometimes collaboration involves outsiders (e.g., university faculty, consultants) who have relevant skills or resources.

Considering action/practitioner research as an alternative to traditional research, Schmuck (1997) argues that action research is:

- *Practical*. As a result of data from insights, practical improvements will occur in the classroom and in the school during and immediately after the inquiry.
- *Participative*. Action researchers are coworkers—such as teachers, students, and administrators in collaboration—collecting data with and for people focused on a real problem.
- *Empowering*. All participants in the inquiry process can affect and contribute equally.

- *Interpretive.* The participants' multiple realities during the inquiry collaboratively determine the social reality. For instance, students and teachers share their perceptions and attitudes with one another.
- *Tentative.* Solutions obtained through the inquiry are tentative and are based on the multiple and diverse views of participants. There is no right or wrong answer.
- *Critical.* Participants not only search together for practical improvements in their educational situations, but they also act as self-critical change agents. A case in point would be teachers asking students for feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching methods.

### III. Generalizability and Validity in Practitioner Research

Generalization or relevance to other contexts is not the primary concern of practitioner/action researcher. As McNiff (1992) points out, as an action researcher:

*I do not initially aim to inquire into other people's situations to suggest to them how they might do things differently. I look first at myself, at putting my own home in order and I feel I am justified in communicating to others how I carried out my own process of self-improvement so that they may adopt and adapt my idea if they wish (p. 3).*

The issue of generalizability can be accommodated in practitioner research by taking into account Stake's concept of naturalistic generalization, which is similar to Lincoln and Guba's notion of 'transferability'. The transferability concept is that research findings are transferred from a sending context to a receiving context instead of being generalized. Anderson, et al. (1994) further describe the concept by saying that if there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator or practitioner researcher than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original action researcher cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the applicators can and do. The responsibility of the original investigator ends in

providing sufficient descriptive data to make contextual similarity judgments possible.

Despite the popularity of practitioner/action research in recent years, some criticize the approach from the point of view of lack of validity of its findings. Larabee (1998, in Cherednichenko et al., 1999) argue that no *a priori* solution exists for the problem, which appears to be an inevitable result of the 'soft' nature of educational research. Mishler (1990, in Ibid.) also points out that validity in conventional scientific sense has less relevance in social science inquiry than 'trustworthiness' or 'validation'. The test for the researcher is not if findings are objective and neutral, but that for more and more investigators that they work, a recognition that they are a part of the social world—a world constructed in and through our discourse and actions, through praxis.

Anderson, et al. (1994) suggest the following tentative criteria for test of validity in practitioner/action research that is transformative in nature (i.e., research that is linked to some kind of action to change educational and/or institutional practices).

#### Democratic Validity

Is the extent to which research is done in collaboration with all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation. If not done collaboratively, how are multiple perspectives and material interests taken into account in the study?

#### Outcome Validity

Is the extent to which actions occur that lead to a resolution of the extent to problem under study. In this sense, validity is synonymous with the "successful outcome of the research project.

#### Process Validity

Is the extent to which are we able to determine the adequacy of the process and to solve the problems in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system. Outcome validity, therefore, is dependent on process validity. If the process is superficial or flawed, the outcome will reflect it.

#### Catalytic validity

Is the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes

participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it. In other words, it is the extent to which the research enables the participants to understand reality so as to transform it. Both the action researchers and participants must be open to reorienting their view of reality as well as their view of their practitioner role.

#### Dialogic Validity

Is the support for the findings accorded by a peer review of colleague practitioners. In academic research the "goodness" of research is monitored through peer review. A similar form of peer review is beginning to develop within and among practitioner research communities. It may be in the form of collaborative inquiry, and of critical and reflective dialogue with a critical friend who is familiar with the setting.

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# Growing up Critical Practitioner

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Our dream has now come true. Unheard voices (of practitioner) are making headways to be heard through an empowering newsletter. As a member of the Alemayan CPI sub-family (part of CPI family), I wish to seize this moment to be heard---to reflect on the journey we are through, our impacts, and the challenges we have been faced with. I strongly feel that a retrospective examination of actions and practices would be quite useful for the journey that lies ahead.

When we first registered to attend M.Ed. in CPI for Teacher Educators, it was with great reluctance and hesitations. To be frank, no one was interested. That was not without any reason. Many of us had gone through up to two decades of modern schooling. The memory of harsh realities of modern educational institutions had not faded. No one had ever thought of going back to college education.

Many of us had had little or no acquaintance with CPI when we first registered. But out of curiosity--- in fact academic desire to know---we began to find out more about critical practitioner inquiry. Although we were able to get hold the draft curriculum of the program during the time of registration at IICBA office, Addis Ababa, we did not succeed in satisfying our curiosity of “knowing”. In part, the scarcity of literature on campus had a lot to do with our failure to know what CPI is and all about the program.

With such a state of confusion and uncertainty a great deal of time elapsed. Meanwhile, five out of the six teacher educators who applied for the course from my institution were informed that they had been admitted to the program. What a moment! Since then, in dramatic ways, we have been going through enlightening encounters and transformative intellectual actions and reactions. May I have a glimpse of some of the intellectual encounters we had in rather reflective manner?

## First Experience

Our first CPI encounter was when we met for the first time in March 2003. That

encounter was named National Institute I (NI-I). That institute demonstrated so vividly our schooling background and conception of advanced education. I now remember all the confrontations and intellectual clashes on the organization and contents of the program.

During that institute, we were introduced to the concept of CPI. The most dramatic moment of the institute was the night when we were made to read the position paper of the program. Our existing worldview was readjusted in a significant way. We were challenged to re examine the schooling system we went through for years. We were faced with quite testing issues such as hegemony, commercialization of knowledge, the role of research in producing and reproducing social injustices, etc. Many of us had never thought before about the linkages of political, social and economic issues with the way education is serviced to the customers in such a significant and revealing scale. Without any doubt, that night was transforming, intellectually informative. Indeed, it was educative.

The institute also created an opportunity of time and space in which teacher educators (from the major higher learning centers) learnt about one another and began to question what they were doing. I would say quite boldly that a culture of CPI began to take shape.

## Second Experience

The second National Institute (organized in October 2003), unlike the first one, was different in many ways. This time, instead of uncertainties, some kind of ‘criticalness’ was characteristic of the discourse of CPI family. A changing view of education was pervasive of all dialogues and interactions. The various artifacts and documents we had been given were so instrumental in reshaping our thought about education. NI -2 gave us another opportunity of dialoging about our practices and critiquing educational policy and intellectual stances. We witnessed in NI-2 we were growing up critical practitioners.

## Impacts

Since those joyous, perplexing, and challenging weeks of NI-1, we have been undergoing a remarkable intellectual transformations; I am upbeat about it. The impact of NI-2 was awakening; the impact of NI-2 was dialoging; the impact of Regional Seminars was sharing and caring. Above all, the impact of the documents of critical intellectuals (such as Apple, Fuller, Walker) was empowering. Let me go further to explain the impacts in more straightforward and usual ways.

*Increased interaction among CPI family members.* Since the first encounter, there is a steady increase of interactions among members of CPI both within and across universities. A case in point is the deepening relationships and information exchange of the Alemayan sub-family. We are skillfully making use of all avenues to reflect on our actions in the light of the insights we get from critical pedagogy intellectuals. Our wisdom is growing steadily by the day as we debate over educational issues in all meeting places (e.g. lounge, corridors, offices).

*Changing pattern of knowledge construction.* We used to believe for quite long time that the process of knowledge construction must always be objective and not value-laden. Consequently, we were remotely distanced from carrying out enquiries notwithstanding the large-scale data collection burden and costs. With a growing awareness and knowledge, many of us are enquiring educational practices and reflecting on it whenever time allows. At present, in relation to CPI intermediate assignments our thesis, we are enjoying the challenges and liberating effects of critical enquiries. I believe, that is in a way the process of empowering the practitioner who works towards social justice.

*Changing trends of practice.* It might sound premature to assess the impact of CPI M.Ed. course on our action. However, on the basis of my present teacher education practices and what my CPI colleagues are doing, I am certain that the training is paying dividend. At



least, I can cite the changes in course organization, assessment, classroom work organization, and restructuring of teacher-student roles. There is a growing awareness among practitioners (of CPI sub-family) that teacher education is at the center stage in sustaining and reproducing social injustices. Teacher education has not been practiced reflectively; teacher educators have been acting on a taken-for-granted basis.

*Influencing others.* Being influenced by critical intellectuals, we are trying to influence fellow teacher educators in all possible ways, such as through our discourses, logo (CPI sub family), actions, changing pattern of collaborations, and commitment. The degree of the impacts we are making varies from person to person. But in general it is significant. The unusualness of the label CPI has contributed significantly to the impacts. A dozen of our colleagues were pretty curious when we first began the course to know what the program was all about because they were used to commonly and usually known frames like M.A. in Education, Distance Education, Special Education, etc. As a simplistic definition of the letters in CPI hardly quenches the thirst of knowing, they have been doing the best of what they would to get familiar with the underlying philosophy of the program. Several colleagues were able to attend our regional seminars; a few colleagues have borrowed some of our core literature materials.

### Challenges

All the efforts we are making to empower ourselves through critical pedagogical thought and action is within all kind of challenges. The most testing one, needless to say, is what Apple calls intensification. In quite unprecedented way, 2003/04 academic year has witnessed class workload of up to 36 hours a week. The maximum class load used to be 12 hours a week. This is a 200-percent increase. Furthermore, we have to pay social costs when we stay late night in office to type our assignments. Apart from work intensity and time as a big area of test there is a non-temporal dimension of challenge we are facing. The challenge of working in a system made in the best interest of neo-liberals and conservatives is unbearable for practitioners who are changing in the direction of critical thinking. Looking for maneuvering space in the midst of the exiting system and practitioners is not an easy matter to grapple with.

### *Regional Seminar II on CPI Succeeded*

*By Tilahun Giday (CPI student, Bahir Dar University)*

Regional seminar on CPI was held on January 24, 2004. Participants of the program and other interested people made it really an educational seminar. Points of discussion were of higher level. How changes in discourse bring about changes in conception and practice and international trends in school management were of major concerns. However for lack of time, not many things have been said about international trends in school changes and school management. In the seminar it could also be known that some participants have started to work on their CPI focal points. However, some problems like delay of release of the research fund and lack of the expected collaboration from teachers in the partner schools are making the research activities lag behind the expected time. Nevertheless, it is assumed that if IICBA materializes its promises to partner schools things will be better. Regional Institute 1 was also conducted among the CPI students, Dr. Lars Dahlstrom and Jan Mannberg (the international tutors).

### *Regional Institute I highly succeeded in Mekele and Addis Ababa Universities*

*By Temechegn Engida (the National Tutor and Coordinator of the MED Program)*

The first regional institute (RI 1) was conducted between 1 and 3 March in Mekelle University and between 4 and 7 March 2004 in Addis Ababa University. The RI 1 in Mekelle University was attended by the five CPI students, Professor Staff Callewart (the International Tutor), Jette Steensen (the International Tutor) and Temechegn Engida (the National Tutor). The RI 1 in AAU was attended by the three tutors mentioned above, the three CPI students and Professor Almaz Eshete (former program coordinator and National Tutor for AAU).

In addition to brief progress report by each CPI student, the Institute focused on a critical look (on an individual basis) at each student's focal point, contextual analysis and proposed interventions. Each of the assignments from the second National Institute in October 2003 was discussed at length among the participants. In relation to the assignments, the participants recognized that the number of assignments should be reduced as each assignment requires a great deal of reading and as each student is fully loaded in their respective Departments. Of course, the Institute also recommended that Deans of Faculties of Education in the respective Universities should recognize the program as a demanding task and hence should consider it on credit hours basis.

Another point discussed during the Institute was the CPI Timeline. In this regard, students raised a question on what the required **actions intervention plan (AIP)** is. This question prompted a discussion on the whole CPI process and the results are summarized as follows:

- AIP is the actual solution you are suggesting for your problem.
- Contextual analysis is your actual problem in the context of your situation.
- You collect data based on your action/intervention plan.
- Progressively the impact of the intervention will be followed up.
- The whole CPI process can thus be summarized as follows:

**Definition of problem → Contextual analysis → Plan of action/interventions → Data collection → Impact of Interventions.**

- Contextual analysis should include references to the Ethiopian educational system as well.
- Portfolios should include not just the final refined documents but also all other things done throughout the process. Even personal reflections upon one's practice through the process of research should be included.
- Exactly 1 year from today, the draft thesis will be submitted to the NTs, who would then submit them to the ITs during the Seminar at Umea University, Sweden.

The first Regional Institute also emphasized the meanings attached to the model given in assignment 2.1, and the results of the discussion are summarized as follows:

- The model is about social change in general and educational change in particular.
- The model:

**Practice - Conceptions - Discourse**

Can also be represented as:

**Structure - Culture – Agent**

- Examples from the Feudal society, feudal culture and the Church as an agent was given and discussed. Similarly, lesson planning by a beginning teacher, his/her conceptual change as he/she practices it, and the influence of discourse among teachers and from educational policy were discussed.

While assignment 2.2 is described as more of a literature work, assignment 2.3 requires an observation of actual teaching practice by each CPI student. Assignment 2.4 is on summarizing the TESO document and checking whether the Ethiopian TESO is competency based or not.

Finally, all CPI students from Mekelle and Addis Ababa Universities submitted their final M.Ed. proposals to the ITs/NT after refining them based on the above-mentioned discussion. The international tutors (Prof. Callewart and Mrs. Steensen) visited Atse Yohannes Secondary School to get additional picture of the context in which the CPI students are working.

### *A Brief Report of MEd in CPI: Students' Activities of Alemaya University*

*By Dr. Brook Lemma (the National Tutor) and Kedir Assefa (CPI student)*

It has been a year (March 2003 to March 2004) since the first batch of MEd in CPI students began their study. Alemaya University has contributed the largest student population to this program. At present, seven students are attending their studies in this program, one of which is a female student.

Out of the seven CPI students, five were able to attend both National Institute I and National Institute II, which were held in March 2003 and October 2003

respectively. Two students who were admitted to the program some months later, were given additional tutorial sessions during National Institute II to make-up for what they had missed in the first Institute.

Following each National Institute there were two Regional Seminars in which CPI students got chances of reflections on and presentations of their work. In addition to National Institutes and Regional Seminars, students were also able to attend Regional Institute 1 during the first week of March 2004. During this period, students were given up to two hours to meet their International Tutor (Dr. Lars Dahlstrom, who was accompanied by Mr. Getachew Kelemu of IICBA) to discuss in detail about their activities.

Since March 2003, when National Institute I held, nine intermediate assignments have been given in relation to educational policy, practice, and thesis. The majority of the students, if not all, completed the assignments by the time of the Regional Institute 1. All of the students had their CPI thesis proposals approved by international tutors. They have been given feedback two to three times since proposal approval. At present, in terms of CPI thesis activities, three kinds of students can be identified:

- Those who have reached a stage of contextual analysis of problem situation.
- Those who are collecting preliminary data for contextual analysis of problem situation.
- Those who are shaping and reshaping their proposals.

In conclusion, this program has put the students in a new and transformative experience. The regional seminars and all other encounters have helped them to reflect on their practices.

### *Regional Cluster Seminars and Institute I Conducted in Dehub University*

*By Dr. Menna Olango, the National Tutor.*

The Dehub University, College of Teacher Education and Health Sciences, is one of the clusters of the MEd in CPI program of the UNESCO-IICBA/Umea University. It consists of five postgraduate students and

one national tutor. The cluster conducted various cluster seminars and in the last cluster the students expressed their moral to start the preliminary data collection on their CPI focal points to pilot the intended methods and to crystallize the situational analysis. In this regard members suggested that on top of what each participant requests in his budget for his CPI project, the NT should request IICBA for some logistical support such as professional audio-tape recorder, LCD projector, laptop computer, Video deck and camera for common use in the Pedagogical Center. The group also indicated that the college and/or the IICBA should somehow support the partner school. It was also said that the ITs should visit our college and the partner school upon their arrival and learn our contexts of the CPI. Despite this good beginning of the semester, the participants were heavily engaged in teaching and module preparation duty and the readings were also voluminous that they could not meet the target date for the assignments and the seminars. They were not clear with what was expected of them in assignment 2.1 either.

As planned the Regional Institute I took place during March 1-5, 2004. All students attended the Institute. Dr. Carol Benson (the international tutor) arrived there on March 1, 2004 and together with the national tutor (Dr. Menna Olango) conducted the Regional Institute 1. During the Institute, two hours were allotted for individual meeting of each student with the IT and NT to discuss on the CPI focal points, contextual analysis, target groups, methods of data acquisition and analysis. Doubts on the assignments were clarified and submission dates were agreed upon. Furthermore, the CPI research proposals were reformulated and budget breakdown was developed accordingly.

Two group meetings were also conducted and such issues as logistics for the carrying out the CPI research, the difference between CPI research and traditional research, layout of the CPI thesis, how assignments can be related to the CPI thesis, referencing (in text and at the end), and qualitative research as related to contextualization and action were discussed in detail. Finally all participants of the Institute visited the partner school, Dilla Preparatory School.