

When eagles are allowed to fly – a global and contextual perspective on teacher education in Ethiopia

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Abstract

The present reconfiguration of education by neo-liberal forces worldwide is taken as a basis for this essay. Drawing on examples of how this reconfiguration operates on national arenas through decisive and dishonest discourses of commoditisation and privatisation, management and efficiency, education for all and student-centred education, the essay looks at the Ethiopian case and how neo-liberalism operates on that arena and how a counter-hegemonic agenda was implanted through a master course for teacher educators following a different and critical practitioner inquiry approach modelling emancipation and social justice within teacher education and society at large.

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Introduction

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The title of this essay has both a promising and a critical meaning. The promising meaning is connected to the specific experiences I have had in working with teacher educators in Ethiopia and their many potentials 'when allowed to fly'. The underlying critical meaning is related to the present global influences on societies and national education systems from the hegemonic neo-liberal and conservative forces emanating from Western core countries and their destructive effects on educational practices, which 'hinders eagles to fly'.

A metaphor of eagles has travelled with me since the 1970s when I met it for the first time in an educational journal published by a group of teachers, who were inspired by the work of the French educator Celestin Freinet. A free translation of the metaphor was published some years later in the Reform Forum, a journal reflecting on the post-apartheid reform efforts in Namibia after 1990.

Eagles do not walk the stairs

The educator asserted that he had developed his methods in a scientific way. He said that his methods were like stairs in the house of knowledge that could bring the learners right up to the top. He had made careful estimates of the width and height of each step to suit the legs of the learners. He had also built landings at strategic places where the learners could rest and comfortable banisters, which could help the beginners.

However, he got very upset one day, not about the stairs that he thought were well planned and constructed with great wisdom, but with the learners who did not seem to appreciate his efforts.

As long as the educator was around observing how the learners walked up the stairs, they took a rest at the landings and held on to the banister when needed, and everything worked as planned. But when the educator went away – even if only for a short time – there was chaos. Only those who were conditioned to follow instructions without thinking continued to use the stairs the way the educator wanted – like dogs trained by their masters. All the other learners found ways that corresponded to their individual needs. One was creeping up the stairs and another took two steps at a time and did not rest on the landings. Some even became specialists in walking the stairs backwards. However, most of the learners

did not find the stairs challenging and interesting enough. They ran around the house and found their own ways. Some climbed up the drain pipe, others climbed with the help of the balcony parapets and reached the top with excitement and in no time at all. On the way down they slid on the banisters only to make another try at climbing to the top.

The educator tried to discipline the learners and force them to follow his guidelines. It never struck him that there were other ways to reach the top of the house such as by jumping, running or taking your time to investigate totally new tracks. He never thought of a different kind of pedagogy that did not force eagles to walk the stairs. (Reform Forum, 1994: 22)

The travel of this metaphor follows the common traits of educational transfer, borrowing and influence, even though it is based on and follows a counter-hegemonic and critical educational track, where today's generally accepted slogans like 'education for all' and 'student-centred education' are given different meanings, which this essay will demonstrate. Having spent a large part of my professional life both physically and mentally with teacher education in Southern Africa I was approached in 2002 and asked to contribute to the professional development of teacher educators in Ethiopia. This request was mainly based on my work with teacher educators in Namibia that had a reputation of being able to combine academic course work with the practice of an action oriented and critical pedagogy in teacher education. The masters course that was developed for teacher educators in Ethiopia together with a team of Ethiopian and international scholars with administrative and financial support from the International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) was carried out from May 2003 to May 2005. As one of my colleagues (Callewaert, 2006: 127) expressed it in retrospect:

Working with education in Ethiopia is a wonderful and painful experience certainly for Ethiopians, but also for participating foreigners. It is wonderful to discover or rediscover a patchwork of regions, societies, cultures, languages, religions and most of all the people who live them. As a European you will soon discover that much of what you believe is your own particular European culture, apparently pretending to become the global culture, was already in full bloom in Ethiopia when your own ancestors were still living their primitive way of life in the forest. You will discover an African country without a colonial past. As an

educationist you will perhaps for the first time in Africa work with faculty lectures and students who have the same educational level as yourself and your own students in Europe. But at the same time, your experience will soon be accompanied by an underlying suffering, when you discover that even here you will meet what may become the tragedy of our time, the radical change from education by educationists to education by neo-liberal management. This radical change, which you have met in the USA, the UK, Scandinavia, Namibia and Mozambique, is constantly disrupting our combined professional efforts across national borders to achieve both a broader competence and social justice.

This essay will address the underlying suffering that Callewaert refers to and that has been the worry by many critical scholars like Apple (1993), Samoff (1999), Jansen (2002), Tabulawa (2003), and Tickly (2004) recently, because of the accelerating onslaught on national educational systems worldwide during the last decades carried out by neo-liberal and neo-conservative forces in the name of 'free trade' and 'freedom of choice', not least by international donor organisations as the midwives in the efforts to streamline national education systems in peripheral countries to suit the same hegemonic purpose, that of expanding the idea of a 'free' market to all human and social activities.

The invisible dishonesty of neo-liberalism and its educational consequences

First, we have to acknowledge that neo-liberalism is based on the idea that every aspect of life should be considered as a commodity that can be bought or sold on a market and that this market follows the logic of profit, meaning that anything put on the market is there for the purpose of someone making a profit. Martinez & Garcia (2000) has summarized the main traits of neo-liberalism as: the rule of the market; cutting public expenditure for social services; deregulation; privatization; and eliminated the concept of 'the public good' or 'community'. The neo-liberal discourses and practices that have been taken for granted in capitalist societies since at least the 1980s (Davies & Bansel, 2007) have accelerated their presence also in peripheral states. However, these societies cannot be characterised as pure capitalist societies because of their layered social infrastructures where people live in parallel

under different conditions that can be identified as late modernity, modern, feudal, or traditional communal (Dahlström, 2002). Layered societies call for a different analysis than the one that can be carried out in a Western state that is predominately capitalist under late modernity conditions. Findings from such analysis will show the complexities that emanate from the specific cultural and social frameworks that each society carry with it from history (Steensen, 2006) and which are manifested in the layered society. Thus, any analysis of the effects of neo-liberalism needs to be based on contextual understandings with the first step being to disclose the invisible dishonesty of neo-liberalism. Tickly (2004) has looked at the new imperialism dictated by neo-liberalism and its impact on education in peripheral states , while Davies & Bansel (2007) give an idea of what this dishonesty is about in their analysis of neo-liberal impacts on education in Australia and New Zealand. Both Tickly and Davies & Bansel have found the governmentality concept useful in their analysis of how the new imperialism works beyond national borders and how it operates on national grounds when the emerging neo-liberal state replaces the administrative state that once developed the now eroding traits of welfare systems. The historical compromise between capital and work that created the political conditions for the development of welfare concepts and practices (Amin, 2004) after 200 years of workers' struggle (Mason, 2007) is now replaced by a different compromise between capital and the state with neo-liberalism and the market at central stage and with the humanitarian effects that Amin (2004) so vividly has characterized as the 'liberal virus'.

The invisible dishonesty of neo-liberalism is related to hegemonic discourses that have the position to define what counts as valid in times when alternative discourses (like the one of socialism) have lost their discursive value. While education and schooling have gained in importance at the discursive level, the recent neo-liberal policies have undermined its humanitarian values and practices and moved education closer to commoditisation through

the introduction of voucher systems, stronger competitions, and further efficiency demands that undermine public education systems globally, following the leading trends in the United States of America (Zeichner, 2006). The commoditisation and privatisation of education follow the discursive patterns of free trade under the slogan of freedom of choice. The illusion of free trade as a humanitarian expansion of opportunity in recent years has already proved its shortcomings even in relation to its own promises of progress, prosperity, and well-being for all. Castells' verdict over the effects of global capitalism is severe:

... the First World has not become the all-embracing universe of neo-liberal mythology. Because a new world, the Fourth World, has emerged, made up of multiple black holes of social exclusion throughout the planet... much of Sub-Saharan Africa, and impoverished rural areas of Latin America and Asia... but also present in literary every country... in American inner-city ghettos, Spanish enclaves of mass youth unemployment, French banlieues warehousing North Africans, Japanese Yoseba quarters, and Asian mega-cities' shanty towns... populated by millions of homeless, incarcerated, prostituted, criminalized, sick, and illiterate persons... They are growing in number, and increasing in visibility, as the selective triage of informational capitalism, and the political breakdown of the welfare state, intensify social exclusion. In the current historical context, the rise of the Fourth World is inseparable from the rise of informational, global capitalism. (Castells, 1998: 164-165)

It is under the disguise of the freedom discourse created by neo-liberal economic forces that human beings have been reconfigured as economic subjects ('homo economicus') and education has been discursively moved from the human rights arena within the United Nation and the international solidarity tradition (education as a human right) to the economic market arena within the World Bank tradition (education as a right of choice). With this reconfiguration comes also the invisible installation of new mentalities through the circumscription of an economic discourse that leaves humans to make the choice and end up as "docile subjects who are tightly governed and who, at the same time, define themselves as free" (Davies & Bansel, 2007: 249). Public education is reconfigured along these neo-liberal lines mainly through three integrated discourses. These are the previously hinted discourses of

(1) commoditisation and privatisation, (2) management and efficiency, and (3) education for all and student-centred education. These discourses have hegemonic positions world wide but affects national education systems differently because of contextual circumstances, which makes them even more difficult to detect. The following exposé will demonstrate their omnipresence.

Commoditisation and privatisation

The recent policy in the U.S., named 'No Child Left Behind' (NCLB) seems to be the most decisive and cunning when it comes to commoditisation and privatisation. The NCLB policy is test and school performance driven, like the league tables in the British system, and has reintroduced 'apartheid schooling' as it produces segregation between Whites, Latinos, and African Americans; inequalities in school funding by race and gender; inequalities in access to teachers; inequalities in teacher retention; and inequalities in access to advanced courses. Further on, the measures that create this situation undermine public education that aims at social justice and democracy, according to Zeichner (2006). In Sweden has the same trends influenced the education system and created a new type of 'parallel systems' with the mushrooming of private education. This has been possible through the neo-liberal reconfiguration of a strong collective culture based on conceptions of the welfare state and free public schooling into a public voucher system, with the effect that taxpayers' money are now financing the profits of private companies running private schooling. The neo-liberal trends of commoditisation and privatisation have also appeared as 'cost-sharing' in peripheral states like Ethiopia, where poor parents are supposed to contribute to the costs of public services like education and by that poverty has been turned into a deviant and at times a criminal human characteristic as sending your children to school as a compulsory parental duty stipulated by most governments cannot be accomplished by poor parents in layered societies.

Management and efficiency

The second discourse has moved the preferential right of interpretation from teachers to managers and created 'the tragedy of our time' mentioned by Callewaert, namely a reconfiguration of education by educators to education by neo-liberal management. Educators are then reduced to curriculum implementers of decisions taken elsewhere who are externally controlled and monitored in the name of the economy. A business-like discourse has entered schools that are supposed to be managed efficiently just like any other corporate business. The selection of a tough school principal who can coach the teachers and students towards good tests results and high positions on the league tables to the lowest cost will be the first priority for the headhunting school board in societies that transform its education system according to this logic. Meanwhile syllabuses and other steering documents are transformed following competency or outcome-based logics that can easily be measured through goal-fulfilling multiple choice testing, leaving the processes of knowledge construction and skills development behind. Teachers have by many neo-liberal educational managers been reconfigured as obstacles to efficiency and therefore been sidelined through the introduction of teacher proof instructional material that are said to be predictable, at least as a delivery system, but gives no guarantees for learning to take place. The discourse of managerialism and efficiency started with Thatcherism also as an attempt to reduce scholarly influences on teacher education perceived as another troubling obstacle to develop teacher education along a technical rationality that did not give allowance for critical perspectives. When critical approaches managed to defend their position in teacher education the neo-liberal forces tried to reconfigure them along technical rationalities. This happened within the areas of curriculum development through the transformation of broad humanistic goals into narrow behavioural entities following logical frameworks where every step is well motivated and

described, giving no room for emancipative thinking or actions, when the final score is counted on the competitive educational market. Schooling as a human right has been turned into a market value through the influences of the neo-liberal agenda that has become the new common sense taken for granted in core as well as peripheral states.

Education for all and student-centred education

The third discourse is probably the most cunning one because of its dishonest semantic dress, just like the policy of 'No Child Left Behind', and works contrary to its literal meaning. The 'education for all-consensus' was initiated in 1990 through the Jomtien Conference in Thailand with UNESCO and the World Bank as the main sponsors, supported by national donor organisations from the Western core countries and dutifully attended and agreed to by peripheral countries and thereby turned into a policy hostage. Education for all promises education – at least a minimum of four years primary education - for all children 'in due time' as it was originally aimed at 2005 and now moved forward until 2015!

The education-for-all-consensus is an extension of the European individualisation project that has its roots deep in the history of Europe that through the education-for-all-consensus has been re-conceptualised as a way to install Western liberal democracy through an 'inclusive' global neo-liberal agenda that persists to call on people to join the global village. Peripheral states are drawn into the agenda through donor demands that force them to submit to the education-for-all-consensus in case they also want to benefit from the inevitable and strongly needed financial and technical support from the donors. Tabulawa (2003) has demonstrated how this 'inclusion' process has worked in the case of Botswana during the 1980s and 1990s. My own experiences from work in Namibia (Dahlström, 2002), Ethiopia (Dahlström, 2003) and Laos (Dahlström, 2006) confirm the omnipresence of the education-for-all-consensus and its operational logics played out through student-centred methodologies. However, when student-centred methods, once introduced by critical

pedagogy, through the neo-liberal agenda are reduced to technical rationalities they seldom work educationally but are more successful on the political level to implicitly install a feeling of dissatisfaction that can be cured by the market through consumerism. The example from Laos is stunning in this regard. Laos followed the other socialist countries in Southeast Asia and introduced what is called the New Economic Mechanism (NEM), another name for a market-oriented policy, towards the end of the 1980s. Demands for educational reforms followed suit through donor sector reviews and concepts like student-centred education and action research began to surface in the beginning of 1990s. Student-centred education has since then been the central concept used in the reform discourse in Laos. However, student-centred education was reduced to the ‘five-pointed star’ at an early stage following the technical rationality congenially adapted to a still communist influenced discursive situation and according to this policy instruction teaching should be followed by activities, go with questions, have teaching aids, divide students in groups, and connect to real life. Classroom observations carried out by a group of PhD students from Laos (Bounyasone et al., 2006) report that the policy of student-centred education has been adapted to the ordinary classroom situation and the teachers’ understandings in such a way that it can be characterised as:

Teaching from the textbook in the absence of other material; asking closed factual questions on the textbook content as teachers do not know how to relate the real life to the content of teaching; and after the teacher has delivered the content of the lesson students are expected to ‘discuss the topic in groups’. p.7

It is rather clear that the educational effects of student-centred education in Laos are meagre if it is meant to alter what is commonly known as ‘teacher-centred education’ and the ‘old methods’. However, there is a strong implicit message in the Lao society that formal education is the key to modernity and with that to become part of the Lao ‘communist’ version of neo-liberalism, the New Economic Mechanism.

The case of teacher education in Ethiopia¹

The present system of teacher education in Ethiopia goes back to the objectives and strategies of the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia of 1994. Some years later a task force was created and one of its findings was unprofessionalism of teachers, who also demand constant salary increases. This led to the development of the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) policy document that was initiated in 2003. The TESO policy represents a paradigm shift according to its own writings (Ministry of Education, 2003) that officially follows the international trends of active learner-focused education operationally installed through a neo-liberal filter. The implementation strategies include changes both in structure and content of curricula, such as through reductions of programmes from 4 to 3 years at the universities and a move from subject to professional emphases including practicum. New areas are also included like action research, civics and ethics, English communication skills and ICT. Furthermore, teacher education institutions are expected to become centres of excellence and to establish effective means of ‘quality’ control starting with the centrally planned and standardized curricula (at the Ministry of Education) for all schools and universities in the country, despite the differences in experience and resources like expert specializations and materials. However, observations and findings from interviews with teacher educators who are expected to implement the new policies show gaps between what are stated in the policy documents and what are practiced, not least because of system overload (Engida, 2006; Kassahun, 2006).

Critical scholars who are familiar with the situation in Ethiopia worry about educational development in the country. Negash (2006:48) claims “the Ethiopian experience is that of mistaking modernisation for Westernization, that is, a process whereby the borrowing of

¹ This part of the essay is partly based on a paper by Lars Dahlström & Brook Lemma (2007) Critical Perspectives on Teacher Education in Neo-liberal Times: Experiences from Ethiopia and Namibia, submitted for publication in Southern African Review of Education.

Western technology and rationality meant the progressive dissolution of the Ethiopian mentality”. Tessema (2006:1, 10) claims that teacher education in Ethiopia is characterized by persistent contradictions, challenges, and chaos and an obsession with the rhetoric of system overhaul and reform. Tessema continues “although three years have passed, the state ‘change agents’ themselves are not yet familiar with and conversant in the metaphors and curricular concepts their consultants had introduced to them” and concludes that the reforms have created deskilling, deprofessionalization, and dehumanization; they have been top-down in spite of their participatory discourse; and follow a standardisation model that ignores local knowledge, diversity and social justice in spite of their rhetoric of educational equity. Hussein (2006:13) examines the value conflicts in teacher education practices in Ethiopia and concludes “the practice of pedagogy as a process of transferring and learning as a process of consuming knowledge are what neo-liberals reinforce” and “that our education is under a battering influence of neo-liberalism of variegated local manifestations”. One of these manifestations will be discussed in greater detail as it has far-reaching consequences for teacher education in the country.

The plasma teacher phenomenon

This phenomenon is officially called Educational Satellite Television Programmes but is commonly known as ‘plasma’ or ‘surrogate’ teachers. All students from Grades 9 – 12 are watching lessons in natural sciences, mathematics, English, and civics that are presented over plasma televisions. In principle, the role of the ordinary teacher in the classroom is to unlock the cage where the screen is placed and to slide the screen in front of the class and eventually to introduce ‘the topic’ by writing it on the board. The teacher has five minutes for this work before the transmission starts following a nationally directed time schedule. During the entire lesson the teacher is then reduced to a spectator just like the students until the plasma television programme ends. This is followed by an 8-10 minutes summary by the teacher on

the lesson just transmitted until the next subject with another teacher and the whole cycle exercise resumes. Throughout this process, 80 to 90 students remain seated in a room designed for 35 students. The analysis of this situation is based on classroom observations and discussions with teachers at two occasions separated by six months. (Lemma, 2006; Dahlström, 2006)

The general impression is one of passivity and uni-directional lectures, contrary to the officially proclaimed student-centred policy, unless you define student-centred education as a practice where the teacher is seen as an obstacle in the classroom. Teachers have nothing to do during the lectures of the plasma teacher and students try to follow the speedy lesson tempo at the beginning of each lesson but many eventually lose interests and turn into passive spectators of the plasma teacher as the TV lectures progress. Occasionally, students are asked to carry out tasks that are framed by a ticking clock at the screen indicating the 20 or 40 seconds allocated per task are elapsing. Most students do not cope with the situation and are not able to finish the tasks on time. After all, it does not matter if students attempt the tasks or not; the answers will anyway appear on the screen at the end of the allotted seconds. To this we can add the following observations: The plasma teachers are not Ethiopians but South Africans, the lessons are carried out in perfect English, but with a South African accent alien to students in Ethiopian secondary classrooms, lessons are culturally framed within alien contexts (e.g. in a civics TV lesson by referring what happens among the audience in the darkness of a cinema theatre in South Africa), and classroom teachers are dehumanised and deskilled. The introduction of plasma teachers has been very successful, if the intention has been to bypass what have been evaluated as inefficient classroom teachers. Teachers claim that their job has become much easier as they do not need to prepare lesson plans any longer and do not have to execute the lessons in class. Instead, the ready-made plasma lessons that are uniform to all students in all parts of the country enter the classroom despite the

contextual differences of students. The policy of continuous assessment has been turned into a multiple-choice final examination per subject given at the end of each semester, since the whole semester is taken up by plasma teacher lectures. Our observations also pose many contextual questions related to the future role of teacher education, the status of the teaching profession, and the vulnerability of high-tech solutions as the remedy to educational problems in remote African situations. We also leave it to readers to put themselves in the shoes of the Ethiopian students who must watch TV sets for hours 5 days a week over 4 years of high school completion and imagine what it feels like to be put up against an inanimate object that does not have any feelings or that never interacts with you.

What is the future of teacher education, when plasma teachers perform the lessons? At one occasion we found a school totally deserted by teachers and the administration (Lemma, 2005). We were told that they had gone for a meeting and the caretakers or guards (as they are called in Ethiopia) of the school have been instructed to open the classrooms for the students who then arranged their own lessons with the plasma teacher. It has also been observed that eventually out of frustration or neglect from lesson planning and curricula organization, teachers start to appear late at school or even be absent for petty reasons. This makes very little difference for the students since the surrogate plasma teacher replaces teachers and since teachers are systematically pushed out of their profession where they are paid meagre salaries for 'doing nothing', let alone instilling critical thinking in the growing minds of students. What kind of teacher education is needed in such situations or is it enough to engage caretakers as teachers? Parents are worried about the teachers' responsibilities in school, as they do not know who is accountable for the education of their children. Purely out of concern and professional commitment, many teachers had developed their own schemes of tutoring students during evenings and weekends to compensate for the lack of learning during plasma lessons and this at times became even contradictory to its purpose as there arose further

questions about teachers' activities during ordinary school hours amongst parents, and as students and teachers seemingly are engaged in education seven days a week. These extra efforts eventually died out since they were not remunerated or officially acknowledged as part of career development for teachers. In fact they were indirectly de-motivated since they undermined the efforts put into the plasma teacher by the government. Total media solutions to educational issues are hence questionable mainly because of educational concerns and its technical vulnerability becomes obvious in contextual situations that are affected by the uncontrolled power of nature as we have been told about schools that have 'lost' their plasma teachers because of the inconsistency and unpredictability of electric power supply, repeated failures to receive satellite images, and other schools that have missed lessons for weeks when they have run out of petrol for the generator.

It is therefore difficult to refrain from commenting when you realize the damages the plasma teachers do to students, teachers, and education in general. Outrage comes forward when you understand that it is deliberately planned and installed through neo-liberal common sense under the official banners of development and improvement through efficiency and transparency for the good of the citizenry, but operates to create external control and ultimate profits for some, because plasma screens and pre-recorded media lessons are expensive and need the involvement of World Bank loans, while still local government revenues are paid for teachers who are reduced to plasma television operators and who are today nicknamed as DJs (disc-jockeys) by students. And most importantly, plasma teachers reduced the whole exercise of the teaching and learning process from critical thinking to delivery of packages to qualify students for certain grades. The lessons from the Ethiopian scenario clearly show that education purely is a commodity available on the global market for students (including the worldwide web) be it in South Africa where the lessons are developed or anywhere in the world, as in Ethiopia.

A neo-liberal agenda meeting its counterforce

When our masters course for teacher educators had been presented to teacher educators in Ethiopia, been thoroughly discussed, and teacher educators from all types of teacher education institutions in Ethiopia had been selected to the course, we were informed about the Higher Diploma Program for Teacher Educators (HDPTE) that the Ministry of Education had decided upon as mandatory for all teacher educators in the country. An attempt was made to look at the two courses to avoid overlap and to create possible accreditations only to find that the two courses were based on totally different educational premises and difficult to combine. The orientation of the HDPTE course had its roots in a consumerist and neo-liberal view of students with learning tasks that encouraged memorisation and imitation (Hussein,2006; Tessema, 2006), while the Masters course, Critical Practitioner Inquiry (CPI) for Teacher Educators, provided a way to “empower all participants in whatever their educational circumstances to act upon their situations on the basis of critical societal and educational analysis in dialogue with the community” (Callewaert, 2006: 128). As a consequence of this situation we were told by the Ministry of Education that we were only allowed to recruit university lecturers as students on the course to the disappointment of ourselves but foremost to the dismay of teacher educators from other teacher education institutions who had already been promised a place on the course.

The CPI Masters course was based on a number of tentative postulates that had been developed collectively amongst a group of critical scholars during a number of years to alter teacher education in both core and peripheral countries and were presented in the position paper of the course (Dahlström, 2003) as follows:

- Conventional academic perspectives have a tendency to view practical knowledge (knowledge of practice) as an application of academic knowledge and not as a form of knowledge in its own right. Hence the needs for situational knowledge as an alternative form of knowledge. The concept situational knowledge is used to describe a combination of knowledge of practice and contextual knowledge that is developed through Critical Practitioner Inquiry. Knowledge of practice is a type of embodied knowledge that often has been adapted to the academic paradigm. This adaptation has given it a theoretical dress that has been delivered back to practitioners as educational recipe books. Critical Practitioner Inquiry is an attempt to break this cycle of academic and technical adaptation. Hence the needs to combine the embodied knowledge of practice with critical knowledge about the conditions for practice in the form of situational knowledge, without allowing a conservative academic turn.
- In order to cope with social situations in a realistic way, educators as well as other practitioners have to integrate into their perspective the view that both practical and academic knowledge are social constructions in pluralistic and difficult terrains of power. The ensuing conclusion is that a constant struggle is staged over which knowledge is legitimate and who are the legitimate carriers as well as learners of that knowledge. Hence the importance of a view that looks at curriculum as a social construction and a field for the struggle over the preferential right of interpretation.
- A basic problem is that education tends to be seen as a system of delivery that does not take into account critical thinking, previous experiences, or learning in society as a whole because delivery systems are based on taken for granted knowledge (common sense). Hence the importance of a pedagogy that includes critical, historical, and experiential perspectives that avoid reducing education to a simplistic and linear relation between teaching and learning.

- Education has to take a drastic turn to invent a new humane practice out of the destructive confrontation between tradition and mainstream westernisation that is taking place in peripheral countries. A new direction shall acknowledge and institutionalise practical and contextual knowledge and the social construction of meaning. It shall involve community and bring back in an accessible way to community the knowledge and skills that education generates to enhance social justice. Hence the importance of a radical pedagogy that acknowledges culture and civil society as integrated fields of educational endeavours.

Hussein (2006:b) has given a full account of his and some of his colleagues experiences from the CPI Masters course from a student perspective and claims that it has accomplished perspective transformation amongst its students. Some of the course participants said the following when they were asked to reflect on the course journey (Dahlström, 2006):

Previously we received things as is and we may not challenge it. As to me being a participant of the CPI gave me the confidence and the critical eyes to look at things around me.

Another student said:

Since I started the programme I have changed a lot. I have developed a consciousness about schooling in general and how schooling affects the life of people. Also the way we get involved in our inquiries is changing us a lot – we did not have this kind of culture before. This kind of education I think is the most important thing that is missing from the conventional type of education in this country.

Further information on Critical Practitioner Inquiry as an emancipative educational approach towards social justice is available at the website of the Global South Network:

<http://alfa.ped.umu.se/projekt/globalsouthnetwork/>

A tentative reflection

Teacher education and education in general is transformed worldwide following the neo-liberal technical rationality. Teachers are reduced to technical caretakers and teacher

educators are expected to act as stooges, to stop thinking by themselves and to act collectively, and only to implement whatever the centrally directed changes call them to do. However, as Gramsci (1971) once said and history has taught us since then, hegemonies are not absolute and for ever. Even in a situation like the one in Ethiopia there is room for counter-hegemonic forces to act and to allow eagles to fly!

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