

Reflections and a pedagogy of hope

When I got the opportunity to write this thesis about something that has been part of my life and mind for almost twenty years I had to face the contradictory pedagogic engravings in my own common sense about educational inquiry. I was brought up within the prevailing positivistic view during my first university studies in pedagogy in the mid 1960s. It was a growing political awareness that directed my interest towards alternative education practices in the 1970s and that made me leave a mainstream pedagogic career for solidarity work in Southern Africa in the 1980s. Now, twenty years later when I am back in the ‘research world’, my mind is still struggling with the earlier engravings from human sciences that portray educational research as hard facts. In that sense, my own history is an example of the intellectual struggle between opposing forces and that this struggle can have far-reaching consequences for a person’s preferential sense. The following reflections are influenced by these previous struggles.

Methodological reflections

If I look back at the result of my work with this thesis I believe that I have managed to paint a defensible picture of a constrained teacher education reform. My first methodological worry was related to the fact that I had been a significant actor in the reform process. Therefore, the participatory perspective was placed within the critical action research tradition with reference to Kincheloe.¹ The participatory perspective

¹ Kincheloe (1995) op. cit. See also Tabachnick, B. R. & Zeichner, K. (eds) (1991) op. cit.; Elliott, J. (1991) op. cit.; Noffke, S. E. & Stevenson, R. B. (eds) (1995) *Educational Action Research. Becoming Practically Critical*. New York: Teachers College Press; Griffiths, M. (1998) op. cit.

combined with the narrative approach provoked concerns about validity of findings. Triangulation and respondent validity were supplemented with other validation concerns related to narrative inquiry.

Triangulation, if applied to this thesis and the broader arena of national teacher education reform, is related to the different sources of data from own documentation, texts by other authors, and retrospective interviews at different levels combined with my individual experiences. The retrospective interviews are also related to respondent validity as these interviews were based on themes in the preliminary findings of the thesis that are still sustained. The 'large narrative' of the teacher education reform process is at times illustrated with 'narrative incidents' in an attempt to increase the plausibility and fidelity of the plot.

The thesis had no ambitions to create a model that could be generalised to other reform efforts. It is up to readers to judge the relevance of the perspectives in this thesis to other situations and whether hegemonic perspectives, conceptions of layered societies, and related influences on change efforts can be applied to these contexts.

Reflections over teacher education reform

When I started to work with the national teacher education reform in Namibia in the beginning of 1990s I had already ten years of experiences from school development and teacher education in Southern Africa. I carried with me an optimistic view of possibility based on these experiences. I thought it was possible to change the enduring pain that formal schooling had turned out to be, not only for children in Africa.² I also embraced the view that symbolically you had to break through the wall of schooling that history had created as the coulisse-school. It was

² My previous work, as a teacher of special education for disaffected children with very little support from the ordinary school system in Sweden, had told me that an emancipatory education worth its name had to operate beyond the mainstream practices of schooling.

with this type of pre-judicious and partisan engravings that I entered the reform arena.

In my retrospective analysis I identified the layered society as the initial stumbling block for teacher education reform. The layered society created a social structural basis that complicated change, even when the bearers of these ideas sympathised with the need for reform. It was the multiple engravings from different historical and parallel layers in the society that formed the common sense. The derived authority was unquestionable. This accumulated a hesitation towards critical practitioner inquiry that tried to move authority over knowledge production closer to the learners. In the same way, this view of authority made teacher educators uncomfortable with the calls for their participation in the reform process as novices in the trade of curriculum development. This uneasiness followed the assumption that if you have no derived authority you should avoid taking responsibility. Responsibility is not for sharing, it is with those in powerful positions. This type of outlook had a strong impact on the aggregated common sense about the teacher education reform.

I expanded my analysis of the influences from the layered society to the extrapolated reform identities that placed the actors on the reform arena in two blocs of identities, the traditional hegemonic bloc and the counter-hegemonic reform bloc. Representatives of the two opposing blocs were identified at all levels. Reform policy had initially an upper hand on the discursive and political level as official knowledge based on the notion that change was almost inevitable after independence. The opposing bloc had its base in the retention of common sense conceptualisations about education that were reinforced by experience and observation from the ritualised coulisse-school. Together these formed the ideological basis of the traditional hegemonic bloc.

A war of position was ensued between the opposing ideas of hope for something different amongst the organic identities and that of maintenance with an improved efficiency amongst the traditional

identities. The intellectual zone for this war of position included three identified levels: the reform framework, the programme imprints, and institutional agency. New conceptions were introduced by the counter-hegemonic reform policy. These conceptions became reinterpreted as they worked themselves through the teacher education system as part of the reform process. In this process the good sense of the reform policy met the common sense of the traditional bloc. There was a struggle over the preferential right of interpretation. It created a transposed sense before it hit the practical ground as a transposed reform. It was the practical reform imprints that affected the social structural basis in the layered society, in the first instance in the college classrooms. It actually changed the conditions for reform, but not always for the better. An influence took place also within the counter-hegemonic bloc when the conceptual basis for a visionary society faded out within a general ahistorical framework and as an effect of the transposition process.³

The question remains whether good sense can survive a transposition process such as the one experienced in Namibia and avoid to become part of the aggregated common sense? It could even be claimed that good sense becomes part of common sense when it is accepted as official knowledge. However that happens only at instances when good sense has lost touch with its moral basis of a visionary society and by that become transposed into a technology distanced from its social basis. The teacher education reform in Namibia deserves a brighter and more hopeful future.

The prolonged piloting process, from the initial production of steering documents, extended over a period of seven to nine years. At the beginning the reform was criticised for being rushed too much as there were less than nine months available to produce the first round of national steering documents. This criticism was based on the view that staff in teacher education could not be prepared fully for the reform. However,

³ See p. 265ff.

this initially criticised starting point created the conditions for the two complementary processes of a national agenda and decentralisation. It became accepted, reluctantly by some, and with enthusiasm by others, that the reform could not be reduced to a once and for all-exercise. This represented a victory for the counter-hegemonic reform policy that embraced the view that change with participation was a time consuming exercise. The reform followed a process that included both the continuous opening up of new terrain and the revisiting of old tracks. This process also included risk taking as the terrain changed its shape continuously as it evolved around the generative reform at the levels of the reform agenda, the programme imprints, and the institutional agency.

The cyclic process that developed created considerable tension and uncertainty in all camps. The reform was perceived by some as untidy in the sense that it opened up new operative avenues that did not follow a linear development logic. Some aspects were disrupted while others were continuously altered in shape and focus. This dynamism also blurred the reform policy even at instances when it was maintained that the policy was untouchable and perceived as an invariable constant. It opened up a zone of approximation where the hegemonic common sense could forward its preferential right of interpretation with transposed effects on the reform. It was also through this cyclic process that reform fatigue appeared on the reform arena with the effect that important reform positions became affected by traditional intellectualism. This was the case with the CCG as testified by respondents in the retrospective interviews. The intellectual life-line of the policy became weakened when individuals in important reform positions started to doubt the essence of the reform. Traditional intellectualism and common sense started to encroach on the interpretations of the policy with further transpositions as a result.

In the light of the policy the cyclic reform process also created more positive opportunities. The different reform imprints worked their way into teacher education. They were based on a participatory process, even if constrained by engravings from the layered society, and they embraced

the notion that there were no predefined solutions to many of the specific aspects of teacher education. The prolonged process facilitated an approach that followed the ambition to create a 'Namibianised' reform. The Namibian educators who remained in the reform arena gradually became the bearers of the reform. These educators constituted the core group of organic intellectuals who carried the reform forward. This organic intellectualism was grounded in conceptions about liberation and was further engraved through the opportunities the reform process created. The bearers of this organic intellectualism usually seized the opportunity to participate in informal and formal staff development activities as a means to strengthen their individual agency in pursuit of the reform, whether through engagement in curriculum work or critical practitioner inquiry. They also became active in the attempts to develop institutional agency through locally organised meeting points in line with the reform policy. However, contrary influences from traditional intellectualism of newly recruited teacher educators, continued to feed the war of position over the preferential right of interpretation in teacher education. This further emphasised the need to sharpen the ideological underpinnings of the reform policy by combining a critical literacy of pedagogy with that of a pedagogy of hope.

Towards a pedagogy of hope

When I compiled my report in 1983 after the first visit to the education centre at Kwanza in Angola I included the following lines as a preface:

The educator is a freedom fighter
Her enemy is mental slavery
And her weapon emancipation
The victory is a free mind⁴

⁴ Dahlström (1983) op. cit., p. 1. Inspired by Marley, B. (1980) *Redemption Song*.

These lines reflected the general political rhetoric of that time but also the hope for a different future. At that time I was often encouraged by the optimism that I found amongst Namibians in spite of the war that raged. In a way, this optimism and the humour as well as laughter that came with it developed into a kind of survival strategy in the midst of misery. The pedagogical practices developed together with our Namibian colleagues and students received a similar kind of sanctuary status. They were human mobilisations for an uncertain but hopeful future. They became, in embryo, a *pedagogy of hope* that included emancipatory and liberating practices within a radical democratic framework of restructuring that also aimed beyond the classroom door.

Soon after independence the hopes for a different society and a different education system were transformed to a range of national policy documents of which the most important became the development brief *Toward Education for All*.⁵ Teacher education reform became the strongest proponent of the expressed policy, yet the most contested field of education after independence as it encroached more than anything else on the prevailing common sense about education. However, this reform was not accompanied by a collective agenda for an egalitarian society building on a radical democracy in the broader political arena as post-independence history has shown.

This contradiction created a condition for a policy backlash over teacher education that resulted in a transposed reform by allowing common sense to remain intact on a broader societal level mainly through the reconciliation policy. Constraining effects set by the international community indirectly hindered a more radical development. For example, the reconciliation policy allowed for internal contradictions that talked the language of the hegemonic powers through the transposed reform. The

⁵ One of the editors has told me that this document is No. 2 on the unofficial 'Best-seller list' in Namibia. No. 1 is The Bible.

reconciliation policy had the effect that independence was turned into a new start with no history.

Both the new government and the previous rulers had self-interests in covering up the past. Instead of dealing with previous atrocities in a way similar to what happened in South Africa through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission the perception was that independence was a matter of starting afresh by forgetting the past. A telling example of apprehension about what reconciliation meant was the conversation I had when I visited a Teacher Resource Centre in Windhoek not long after independence. The white centre manager showed me around and after the visit I handed over one of the booklets that students in the ITTP had produced. This booklet had the title, *Stories from the Struggle*. The only comment the centre manager had to the booklet was that he questioned if the title was not against the reconciliation policy. This person was later employed by NIED and had for some time an important position in the teacher education reform.

The most significant and official example of the unwillingness to deal with the past was the debate that was sparked off by the publication *Namibia, The Wall of Silence*.⁶ This book attended to some of the atrocities made in the name of the liberation struggle and was officially condemned by the government. SWAPO's response was to publish a list of names of people who died in the liberation struggle.⁷ This publication included a total of 7.794 individuals with their real or combat names but with no explanation of the real causes of death beyond that the majority died in combat or because of diseases (75%), others because of unknown reasons (14%), and others who simply went missing (12%). The ahistorical turn after independence did not merely bury old atrocities, it

⁶ Groth, S. (1995) *Namibia, The Wall of Silence*. Wuppertal: PeterHammer Verlag GmbH.

⁷ SWAPO Party (1996) *Their Blood Waters Our Freedom*. Windhoek: SWAPO Party.

also buried the achievements made under the constrained conditions that led to independence.

Even though Namibia got a new and democratically elected government at independence and new national policies including the furtherance of human rights, a lot remained the same within a fragile modern state framework. Whatever was present of human agency and mobilisation for the common good went missing in the transformation of the liberation agenda to the market-driven and individualised capitalist mode of social development based on ambitions to become part of the illusionary global village.

Thus, even though officially inscribed in policy documents, a human mobilisation towards the values of the policy that had grown out from a liberation perspective was disrupted after independence and replaced by a transposed reform. Critical reflection can also be made concerning the transformation of hopes into the institutionalisation of national policy documents. Such processes can run the risk of compartementalising policy at a rhetoric level with common sense prevailing at the practical level. A pessimistic interpretation of the situation with a transposed reform is that it could be the beginning of a serious defeat following the agenda of a conservative restoration in the international arena. The consequence could be that the reform policy would remain at the discursive and conceptual level as official knowledge, but with transposed meanings and detached practices.

From a more positive perspective the present situation can be seen as a recess, a time-out to gain strength. This intermission can be used for a critical reflection amongst the organic intellectuals and as an opportunity to reorganise the forces of reform and the organic intellectualism. The values behind the reform policy can be revived through a pedagogy of hope and a more radical democratic praxis starting from the degrees of freedom available in the field of education. The first step towards a pedagogy of hope is to recognise the effects of the post-apartheid policy by placing it in a critical historical perspective. Independence brought

with it a new kind of ahistorical thinking that excluded the present from critical thinking much due to the reconciliation policy. Therefore, an important issue is to revive from the past as historical critic of the present what Giroux has called "dangerous memory".⁸ Dangerous memories of suffering and the combat that followed were integral parts of the liberation policies. The euphoria of political independence led dangerous memory astray in the official knowledge as if history ceased to exist with the coming of independence. Groups of organic intellectuals will, through a critical appraisal, be able to "advance both the language of critique and the language of possibility and hope".⁹

It is within the "language of critic" conception that critical literacy of pedagogy, as introduced earlier, should be placed.¹⁰ The methodological dyads in critical literacy of pedagogy can be further elaborated in relation to the moral purpose of schooling that are implicated in a pedagogy of hope that acknowledges dangerous memory. Such critical educational practices would move schooling beyond the ritualised coulisse-school and break out a new way for a future of a different conceptual understanding of school knowledge, learning, and teaching, as well as assessment and evaluation. A pedagogy of hope would find its initial outgrowth from the organic intellectualism of reform practices, like critical practitioner inquiry. A pedagogy of hope would also need to free itself from the historical common sense about formal schooling as a parallel to a necessary partial de-linkage to the present destructive global expansion of capitalism.

Further research into teacher education reform should follow along the participatory and critical lane. It follows from the above that such research should aim at the furtherance of an understanding of teacher education reform to unveil common sense and hegemonic perceptions

⁸ Giroux, (1997) op. cit. p. 105.

⁹ Giroux, (1997) op. cit., p. 105.

¹⁰ See Chapter Two, p 45.

hindering radical democratic practices in pursuit of social justice. As Walker expressed it in relation to the needs for educational change in South Africa:

One can either retreat from the enormity of educational and social problems; or pretend that there is no connection between shocking inequalities and what goes in schools; or take a stand through our actions and our words to further the interests of the poor and the oppressed by connecting issues of social justice and equity, however imperfectly, to our work as educators.¹¹

The reform managed to alter many of the conditions for teacher education in Namibia, but failed to eradicate some of the prevailing common sense, a conjuncture, that ultimately created a transposed reform. However, the reform attracted international interest. In a commentary to an article in an international educational journal about teacher education reform in Namibia,¹² Kohl expressed the following view.

I think that societies where democratic ideas are alive and vibrant rather than limping and in disrespect, as in the United States, can teach us about democracy and be sources of inspiration. The struggles in Namibia have to do with finding ways to throw off colonial and authoritarian educational systems that have been internalized by some Namibians who have power. The paper represents an attempt to create what Paulo Freire called a teacher formation centre based in community knowledge and culture. A bottom-up teacher education program make sense, not merely in a society in the process of building a democracy out of a revolutionary struggle, but in a tired democracy like the US where listening to local voices is often considered irrelevant.¹³

¹¹ Walker (1996:a) op. cit., p. 2.

¹² The article was written by Dahlström, L., Swarts, P. & Zeichner, K. (1999) Reconstructive education and the road to social justice: the case of post-colonial teacher education in Namibia. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. Vol 2 No 3. London: Taylor & Francis. 149-164.

¹³ Kohl, H. (1999) Social justice and leadership in education: commentary. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. Vol 2 No 3. 307 – 311. p. 308.

Kohl concluded with a visionary statement that can also be taken as a promising vision for the future in Namibia in line with Serpell's notions of a radical redefinition of modern schooling.¹⁴

Teacher who cannot relate to the communities in which they work cannot survive for long and the work in Namibia provides hope for a time when teacher education and community development are part of the same process.¹⁵

A narrative about a reform in Namibia should be rounded off with a Namibian voice. In his concluding remark one of the respondents noted:

At the end of the day, to get anywhere with any reform you need some kind of dedication, some kind of vision or commitment. If you don't have that, nothing is likely to happen. And you should be prepared to take risks!¹⁶

This thesis has shown that there was dedication, vision as well as risk-taking involved in the initial years of teacher education reform in Namibia. This part of the reform journey stops here. There is a continuation of that journey and with that a continued struggle: *A Luta Continua!*

¹⁴ See p. 62.

¹⁵ Kohl (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 308.

¹⁶ Interview, M0.