

An autobiographical narrative towards Critical Practitioner Inquiry and a counter hegemonic southern network

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Abstract

This paper is an autobiographical narrative to demonstrate how educational practices and ideas travel through time. It demonstrates how pedagogy based on solidarity and counter hegemonic ideas combined with scholastic perspectives build coherent practices in different social contexts.

The work as a teacher, teacher educator, and researcher in Sweden created an experiential and scholastic foundation for a critical pedagogical perspective that was further developed in the global South.

The colonial spectres are still haunting the capitalist development paradigm as a cure against poverty and so called backwardness. Furthermore, the time when education was seen as an emancipatory activity has now been replaced by the entrepreneurial saints of individualism and marketizations. In spite of the present hegemonic perspectives there is room for counter hegemonic thinking and pedagogical practices struggling for a re-emancipatory and re-enlightening vision of pedagogy. Critical Practitioner Inquiry (CPI) is one such torch in the darkness.

CPI as a situationally relevant and critical version of action research was moulded in the context of the liberation struggles in Southern Africa in the 1980s. It was further developed after Namibia's independence in 1990, transferred to Ethiopia after 2002, applied in Lao PDR during the years up to 2011, and recently adapted to the situation in Afghanistan.

The CPI concept has been developed and adapted to situations at hand still being faithful to its basic idea of a critical perspective and solidarity. CPI can thereby avoid the dogmatic and taken for granted approaches that commonly are the characteristics of western policy ensembles exported to the global South.

Keywords: Critical Practitioner Inquiry, autobiographical narrations, global south network

There is a crack in everything,

That's how the light gets in.

(Cohen, 1992)

Background

This narrative goes back more than forty years. I started my work as a primary school teacher in 1967. A small village school in the province of Lapland in northern Sweden became my first place of work. In addition to teaching a mixed group of students in grades 4-6, I was also asked to run an introductory course in English for some of the parents to my students. Occasionally I travelled the 90 kilometres to my hometown to attend evening classes in Pedagogy organised by the newly established university. The university was at this time called the 'red university' because of the activism of students and the progressive and socialist ideas that flourished on and outside the campus. International solidarity and support to liberation movements, especially in Southern Africa, but also oppositions to the US war in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as well as the fascist Pinochet regime in Chile were important parts of student activities and discourses.

After some years I was employed as a special education teacher in my home town. That work was also influenced by the broader social context of the time. Creating sanctuary in a welfare state for students with special needs sounded like a contradiction as the welfare state was supposed to be the sanctuary in itself. I was asked to teach a group of basic education students. They were separated from the ordinary classes because of their challenges in coping with perceived normality. The most important task in this situation was to repair the students' self-esteem, to establish learning situations where they could develop an understanding of the surrounding realities, and to create a feeling of success.

One example of a 'critical pedagogy of place', to borrow a recent concept from Gruenewald (2003), was to develop a functional understanding of Mathematics. Instead of using the sequential illogic of the Maths textbook (Macintyre & Hamilton, 2010; Kilborn, 2003) we used available topics from life that engaged the students as starting points. As an example, we used an opinion poll amongst the parents as a means to learn about basic calculations, percentages, and the construction of tables. The students had to interpret the data and to discuss the fact that there were different opinions amongst the parents. This approach was considered as contextually and culturally accurate. It was framed by a social issue that engaged the students and used language as a mediating tool to carry out mathematical calculations for understanding both mathematical and social issues. However, my work was also criticized by school administrators for being 'dangerous' as the student could get 'some ideas' concerning the issues under study. Obviously education was only meant for learning technical aspects separated from the differences in meaning.

At another time the social studies syllabus dealt with the organization of local governments. To start with we went through the textbook's rather abstract description of how local governments are organized. This did not create any interest amongst the students. Therefore we selected a topic in the local newspaper that was related to the operations of the local government in our town. The topic dealt with the future infrastructure of a central block in town. The students prepared questions to the representative of the local government and inhabitants of the area. After interviews with local government representatives, inhabitants in the area, and other concerned citizens, the data were put together. The findings showed that the topic was surrounded by controversy. The students decided to make a model of how the area could look like in the future. The findings and the model was then displayed as an exhibition at the town square. The students were in charge of informing visitors about their project and findings. Even the local media attended the exhibition. To read a newspaper article about the exhibition became the final step of the project. The best evaluation of this work was to experience the students' pride in receiving other students' as well as teachers' positive comments. I saw this way to teach as an example of a contextually relevant approach to learning with a practical emphasis following the approaches by the Freinet Movement (Freinet, 1975; Castles & Wustenberg, 1979; Legrand, 2000).

In mid 1970s I was recruited as a teacher educator to the College of Education at the university. I was employed to work in a course for teachers who wanted to upgrade themselves as certified special education teachers. Local curriculum development was introduced at university level at this time. This sparked the development of a one year upgrading course for teachers that became both controversial and encouraging to participants as well as the national authorities. Through this work we challenged the boundaries of curriculum development. In essence it was an attempt to utilize previous experiences amongst teachers as a starting point for a critical analysis of taken for granted ideas about handicap, social problems, and the role of education in society.

The teachers who participated in this course had many years of experiences as ordinary subject teachers or unqualified special education teachers. Their ambition was to become certified teachers in special education through this one year course. The group of more than sixty teachers attending the course annually had more experiences together than the six teacher educators assigned to work with them. This motivated us to develop an approach to curriculum development as a bottom up development format much like the one Schwartz (1991) some 25 years later called an organic metaphor.

We started by going through the human and other resources at hand amongst teacher educators and course participants as well as the financial resources we had for calling in external experts. From this we developed common themes as well as specific project groups that worked with issues of interests. It took us a couple of months to create the schedules for the work during the remaining months of the course. All themes were covered and all project groups had reported their findings when we reached the end of the course.

This curriculum development model was not something that everyone agreed with. Some of the participants were very negative as they wanted everything to be served by the teacher educators. The staff at the department became divided. Some were for and others against this approach. Furthermore, we and colleagues at other colleges in the country who also had developed alternative ways to organise this course were called to a meeting with the national authorities for a reprimand. However, most course participants appreciated the way the course was organised and participated fully in the activities. Post-course evaluations included comments similar to the following:

“I think I was born anew as I at an age of 30 started to think independently thanks to the way the course was organised. We applied a participatory methodology and worked to solve real problems in society. (Dahlström, 1979, translated from Swedish)”

The practices as a teacher and teacher educator were influenced by alternative pedagogy, the concept used for approaches that did not follow the mainstream of that time. Therefore, when I was recruited as a volunteer to the Swedish Peace Corps under the Swedish International Development Authority (Sida) in 1980, I saw it as an opportunity to develop these pedagogical ideas further. It also created a twenty years break in my PhD studies at a Swedish university which luckily gave me another focus in my future research activities.

Alternative Pedagogy becoming Critical Practitioner Inquiry

The opportunity to experience something different made me alter my professional focus towards Southern Africa in the beginning of the 1980s. It also accentuated the will to create an education that made a difference by strengthening the pedagogical aspects that had been moulded through my previous experiences. It emphasised the pedagogical perspective that I had developed based on solidarity, the importance of social, cultural, and political contexts, and education as a meaningful process for understanding and empowerment. The view that education and pedagogy have political connections became strongly manifested in Africa.

Before I and my family left Sweden we went through rather thorough preparation courses organised by Sida. These courses were often run by Africans and made me fully aware of the common problems attached to the meeting points between western ‘experts’ and African practitioners. These preparations made me even more humble towards the situations that I was going to face in village schools and communities. It also encouraged me to develop an approach and a practice similar to what Leonard (1993, p. 166) refers to as an “intellectual defector” or what I in retrospect called an “outsider-within” position (Dahlström, 2002, p. 15).

Working against the mainstream

Conditions and contexts changed for me as I became an educational volunteer in Botswana during the global anti-apartheid era and the ongoing liberation struggles in South Africa and Namibia. The local situation in rural villages in northern Botswana was at first sight a matter of daily survival. Social and political issues had to be on the agenda because of their close

relations to starvation, drought, and feudal, as well as colonial mentalities. I tried to make educational experiences socially and politically relevant by introducing a pedagogy that integrated pressing social issues in the midst of a southern African continent heavily influenced by colonial and racist notions. Freire (1975) and his conception of 'conscientizacao' became an inspiring critical perspective that was added to the scholastic framework together with the progressive ideas flourishing in the region through the work of educators like Van Rensburg (1984), Bond-Stewart (1986), and Seidman (1990).

My position as an In-service Education Officer for primary education based in Francistown, not far from the border to Zimbabwe, was surrounded by traditions of inspection by my two Batswana colleagues. Classroom methodologies were signified by oral chorus repeating after the teacher or copying of texts from the blackboard that for some students never reached beyond writing the date, subject, and topic, before it was time for the next lesson.

Two major activities influenced my work, one directed towards classroom activities and another focusing on social awareness. As an In-service Officer I worked at village schools in the district. I often stayed for a week before returning to the office in Francistown. The constant lack of relevant reading material for the students encouraged me to collect material from life in the villages as an integrated part of the classroom activities. This was organised through students' interviews with the elders or through workshops with teachers when they documented traditional stories. These documentations were then edited and printed in small booklets and redistributed to the schools in the district as reading material both in English and Setswana. The social awareness perspective was dealt with in different ways like workshops for teachers when they for the first time could discuss broader issues of pedagogical and social relevance related to the role of schooling in society. I also found out that teachers as well as other villagers had very little knowledge about the liberation struggle in the neighbouring countries and the social consequences of apartheid. This inspired me to print booklets about township life outside Cape Town and to show documentary films like 'Generations of Resistance' (Davis, 1980) in the villages during evenings. These films were rented from the UNDP office in Gaborone and shown outside on the school walls by bringing both a film projector and a generator as electricity was not available in any of the villages.

The activities to produce booklets for students and teachers as well as arranging the film shows in villages were highly appreciated by students, teachers and other local people. In these efforts I was supported and encouraged by the staff at the Teaching Aid Production Unit (TAPU) in Francistown. Others reckoned it as beyond the responsibilities of an in-service officer. Conservative forces in the Ministry of Education and their western advisors at the headquarters in Gaborone did not appreciate my work. Therefore, I was recommended through a Swedish advisor at the headquarters in Gaborone to stick to what they considered as my narrow job description, which I discursively accepted but refused to follow in practice. Living in the midst of a complex social situation with colonial, apartheid, and racist notions, undercover agents operating against the liberation movements in the region, and the occasional meetings with political refugees from the surrounding countries could not be ignored in my pedagogical efforts. There were different external agendas operating in

Botswana at this time. I was for example once approached by an American working in a different project financed by USAID. He wanted me to tell him about the Swedish support to the liberal struggle and the influences of socialistic ideas in Sweden. Another aspect of the external influences in the educational sector during this time has been analysed by Tabulawa (2003) and tells the story of the same USAID project from a westernisation and acculturation perspective.

The merger of educational, social, and political issues never became a problem to establish 'conscientizacao' when I started to work together with one of the liberation movements in the Southern African region. This work started after I had finished my contract period in Botswana in mid-1983. I was asked by the Head of Sida's Education Department to travel to Angola to see what Sweden could do to support the education for Namibian refugees.

Education and political struggle in a liberation movement

After arriving in Luanda, the capital of Angola, I had to wait a few days until the Education Secretary of South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) came back from a mission in Europe. Furthermore, the 300 kilometres long road to the refugee camp had to be cleared from military activities and mines due to the war in Angola between the government and the UNITA rebels. UNITA was supported by South Africa and the US, while the Angolan government received support from Cuba and the liberation movements in the region. SWAPO was the largest liberation movement fighting for a free Namibia. SWAPO had been given a sanctuary by the government of Angola for its military wing as well as its civilian refugees. Many of the civilians stayed in a camp in the Kwanza-Sul Region in Angola. At this refugee camp there were hundreds of school aged children and SWAPO had started to build up an education centre in the camp. However, most of the teachers had little or no professional training. They survived in their work mainly through the imitation of their former teachers in Namibia. These former teachers worked according to the methodology of Bantu education introduced by the apartheid regime. The general classroom process was to ask the students to repeat in chorus after the teacher. These processes were more or less the same as inside Namibia even though the subject content had been adapted to the new situation as part of a liberation struggle.

After some initial assessment of the situation we agreed jointly with SWAPO to develop a teacher education programme integrated with the lived situation for both students and teachers. This approach was sometimes criticized by potential students of the programme. Many of them preferred to be recruited to activities that could make them leave the troublesome situation in Angola. Many also preferred to carry out fulltime studies in one of the Western countries. However, we wanted to develop an education that mattered both for students and teachers including the politics of life and education in Africa as obvious ingredients of a teacher education programme. The Integrated Teacher Training Programme (ITTP) became the negotiated result with half of the studies in the refugee camp in Kwanza-Sul and the other half at Umea University in Sweden. The programme was based on four guiding principles adding up to a model for a critical and liberating teacher education. These

principles combined aspects within a collective framework for student-centeredness and democracy, integration and function, education and production, as well as reflective and inductive methodologies (Dahlström, 1989).

A significant part of the three years programme included an area of study called Integrated Studies combining pedagogy and sociology with methods of teaching and learning. It also created a bridge between the studies in Sweden and the periods of further studies and teaching practices at the centre in Kwanza-Sul and after Independence in 1990, at schools in northern Namibia.

The systematic attempts to create integration between education, contextual situations, and critical perspectives emanated into school projects. This became the embryo towards what later on became Critical Practitioner Inquiry (CPI). The early school projects were inquiries into broad conditions affecting schooling. Each student teacher had to present their reports as an integrated part of the examination portfolio. The school projects dealt with diverse topics such as:

- *Methods and production of teaching material in Mathematics for grade 1*
- *Shy and silent, neglected and forgotten*
- *Cooperation among teachers*
- *How to involve the community in school development*

Some of the school projects were printed as small booklets that also became useful for other solidarity projects in northern Namibia. The ITTP was phased out as a pilot project when the national teacher education reform started in 1993.

Much of the work in the ITTP was an outgrowth from educational ideas initiated by the French educator Célestin Freinet (1975) and the Brazilian Paulo Freire (1975). The engagement of the student teachers in their efforts to carry out meaningful projects that improved the conditions for education influenced the future work. It had an impact on the national reform efforts of teacher education as well as the further education of teacher educators. The reconstruction of teacher education started in 1983 and I was selected as the Project Leader of the Swedish support to teacher education mainly because of my previous work in Botswana, Angola, and Namibia.

The birth of CPI in the struggle between organic and traditional intellectual thinking

The involvement in the national teacher education reform efforts in Namibia rested on my previous educational experiences and influences from educational practitioners and scholars as outlined above. The post-independence situation carried with it a very specific reform framework. The administrative and teaching staff at the Ministry of Education, the colleges of education, and the newly established University of Namibia (UNAM) remained to a large extent the same as during the pre-independence era as a consequence of a reconciliation approach. Meanwhile, the political leadership had changed to a majority rule by the previous

liberation movement SWAPO, now the strongest political party in the country. This situation created a strong political message of reform and change from the top with a reconstruction of teacher education as a priority that started in 1993. However, the willingness on the ground amongst educational administrators and educators was divided. This division followed in principle the old settings as attended to in an analysis of the post-independence teacher education reform (Dahlström, 2002). This analysis used Gramsci's (1971) conceptions of traditional and organic intellectuals as a way to position the different participants in the reform agenda in two opposing blocs. Another complication has been addressed by Callewaert (1999) that is reflected in the title of his text *Which way Namibia? Or How to Decolonize the Colonized Mind of the Anticolonial Teacher*.

The concept of Critical Practitioner Inquiry (CPI) was developed in a situation where the bloc of traditional intellectuals tried to keep their own preferential right of interpretation over teacher education intact. The CPI became an integrated part of the teacher education reform after Namibia's independence in spite of the operations of the traditional intellectuals. There were many reasons for this development. One was to emphasise the critical perspective of education carried over from the liberation struggle. Another was to create a concept that was not imported from outside or just taken over from western countries such as 'action research' even though action research became an influential model. Scholars operating within the broader field of action research, like Kenneth Zeichner from Madison University in the US and John Elliott from the University in East Anglia in England had an impact as they worked occasionally in the project that I was responsible for. Melanie Walker from the University of Cape Town was also asked to contribute to courses for teacher educators. Furthermore, CPI could also be seen as a counter-hegemonic response to the taken for granted ideas amongst the traditional intellectuals on the ground. These taken for granted ideas were based on a pedagogy with roots in "religious metaphysics and Anglo-Saxon empiricism" formalised as "fundamental pedagogics" by the apartheid regime (Callewaert, 1999; Van Harmelen, 1997).

The national reconstruction of teacher education was carried out in a country that was still marked by the legacy of apartheid, even though the new government was formed by the former liberation movement. A common teacher education programme for all student teachers (regardless of race and colour) was developed and started to cater for the need of teachers for primary and junior secondary education, i.e. basic education for grades 1 – 9. This had the effect at the beginning that many white students teachers preferred to study in South Africa especially at the white dominated Stellenbosch University.

CPI became an important part of the Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) as well as an integrated part of the preparations of teacher educators for the programme through Higher Diploma and Masters Studies.

CPI was introduced in the BETD programme as one of the professional themes outlined in the Broad Curriculum. CPI also became an inquiring pedagogical approach combining efforts during the three years of studies to create situational understandings and improved learning possibilities.

CPI as an attempt to establish a new relation between pedagogical practice and inquiry was summarized in five points:

1. CPI attempted to break with the common reductionist view that educational practice was applied theory.
2. CPI challenged the preferential right of interpretation which academics had assigned to themselves over educational practice.
3. CPI acknowledged the development of theories about practice as an academic area in its own right, but did not recognise the reduction of these theories to technical dogmas that practitioners were expected to follow.
4. CPI supported the development of a theory of practice based on practitioner inquiry.
5. CPI supported the documentation of accounts of educational change, which collectively contributed to a written knowledge base of education. (After Dahlström, 2002, pp 186-187).

The BETD Broad Curriculum and subject syllabi were developed in parallel with the successive implementation of the BETD in a participatory process at the four colleges. The Broad Curriculum outlined eight professional themes that were supposed to reflect the areas of professional competencies that the programme should develop amongst the student teachers in an integrated way. The professional theme related to CPI was expressed as “Developing a critical inquiry approach into one’s own practice and context” in the final version of the Broad Curriculum (MBEC & MHEVTST, 1998, p. 6). The professional themes became the overarching objectives that the programme should be permeated with in all its nuances. Therefore, student teachers were supposed to address these professional themes already during the first term of the studies and the themes should run through all terms during the three years of study. This was a further elaboration of the school projects in the ITTP pilot project.

The CPI was introduced during the Education Theory and Practice (ETP) studies integrated with the preparations for their first School-Based Studies (SBS) during the last term of the first year. The focus was on the learning strategies of school pupils in the subject areas that student teachers had chosen as their specialisations. This demanded that student teachers made careful analysis of how pupils learnt the subject knowledge through observations and interviews. The findings were brought back to the college and became integrated with the further subject studies. During the second year the CPI projects concentrated on the context for schooling through preparations at the college and data collections during SBS. These inquiries could contain collections of information about the social backgrounds of pupils, how the administration of the schools was carried out, how the relationships between the community and the school worked, or how the availability or lack of school material affected the teaching and learning processes. During the last year of the programme previous CPI studies and inputs from both subject and ETP studies developed into a final CPI project that aimed at some kind of improvement of the learning situation for pupils. All CPI activities were then documented in the form of a final CPI report that became part of the student teachers’ examination for the BETD programme. Therefore, the final CPI report contained

data on students' developed understandings of educational situations, contextual understandings, and their attempts to improve and develop educational practice. (Dahlström, 2002)

While the BETD programme was developed and implemented at the colleges another development took place in parallel amongst teacher educators on a voluntary basis. Staff development courses were created at Bachelor and Masters Levels as 20 or 40 credits courses, i.e. corresponding to 6 months or 12 months of full time studies. These courses also applied a CPI approach including studies into the teacher educators' professional areas through inquiries of relevant contexts, actual areas of operations, and attempts of improvements. More than half of all teacher educators participated in these courses on a voluntary basis. These CPI reports covered almost all areas of education in Namibia from lower primary, junior secondary, special education, teacher education, language policies, school and college subjects, assessment and examination, reform conceptions, to infrastructural issues. The intention with these courses was to give teacher educators experiences from the kind of critical awareness that the reconstructed teacher education system in Namibia was aiming at.

Two publications with an emphasis on CPI reports were published as a result from the teacher education reform efforts. The book edited by Zeichner & Dahlström (1999) describes some of the specific intentions behind the BETD programme and presents a number of CPI reports both from student teachers in the BETD programme and teacher educators who have gone through the professional development courses designed for educators in Namibia. This book was published both in Namibia and the USA. In a chapter written by Zeichner & Tabachnick (1999) they outline several distinctive orientations to teacher education that are found in Africa with some references to other scholars like Avalos (1991). Zeichner & Tabachnick describe these orientations as (1) a behavioural skills-training approach; (2) a model approach; (3) an academic approach; (4) a participatory and inquiry-oriented approach, and (5) a social reconstructionist or transformational approach. They conclude that "the general thrust of the teacher education reforms in post-independence Namibia have been participatory and social-reconstructionist in nature" under "the tensions and contradictions that have been associated with the implementation of these reforms" (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1999, pp 216-218).

Another publication edited by Dahlström (2000) was published in Namibia and presents a total of twelve CPI reports by teachers and teacher educators in the country of which four were published also in Zeichner & Dahlström (1999). A review of this book was carried out by Capacci Carneal (2001). This review is a good example of what kind of educational development that the CPI projects have accomplished. Capacci Carneal (p.1) says that "instead of scholars passing down knowledge, the practitioners in this book are creating it on their own by accessing and reflecting on academic literature and their personal experiences". Further on, she describes how one teacher attempts to motivate learning through community-based activities and how many of them take into account culture and cultural practices when

they discuss classroom activities. She concludes that it is a handy book to have nearby for both academics and practitioners not only in Namibia.

The BETD programme and the critical educational philosophy it was resting on were not appreciated by all Namibians especially the cadre of traditional intellectuals. When national donors like the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and others started to withdraw their direct support to infrastructures like the national teacher education system, room was created for others to take their place which was what happened around 2005. For instance, the World Bank and their “research consultants”, who previously had been marginalised in the educational sector in Namibia, were allowed to mark their global footprints also on Namibian soil (Samoff, 2007). This situation created a new phase of involvement for the two groups of organic and traditional intellectuals. The traditional intellectuals gained in strength and after a few years of strategic findings from consultancy research it was decided in 2011 that the BETD should be replaced with programmes following the common and traditional university thinking. This development created a situation similar to the pre-independence structure as teacher education colleges returned to become second tier campuses under the University of Namibia instead of independent government institutions.

The political liberation struggle for independence ended with a victory in 1990, while the intellectual struggle for emancipation and the right to critical understanding is still on the agenda in Namibia. The BETD and its progressive attachments like CPI were hijacked by the World Bank and replaced by conservative academic ideologies after two decades of hostility and sabotage against the BETD.

Every student teacher and many teacher educators and teachers carried out Critical Practitioner Inquiries during the twenty years when the BETD was developed and implemented as the national teacher education programme at the four colleges in Namibia. All CPI projects were documented based on the idea to create a new and critical knowledge base for education in the country. In retrospect I think it was unfortunate that this idea never materialised in a more systematic way. The CPI reports never became a basis for future reflections or development of teacher education except for the two publications mentioned above. They were at best reduced to individual achievements collecting dust following the main-stream normalisation of education. The idea to establish a critical knowledge base of education through CPI was disrupted by the return of the World Bank and the old hegemony. However, critical thinking survived amongst Namibians who had adopted some of the ideas introduced during the teacher education restructuring when they continued their work in other ways (Dahlström & Nyambe, 2014). The CPI model as a critical approach moved elsewhere on the African continent.

When eagles are allowed to flyⁱ

The successes in Namibia with the CPI and its staff development program became known internationally and we were asked to introduce a Master Programme for teacher educators at

a number of universities in Ethiopia. A CPI Master Program was developed and carried out with the financial and logistical support from an UNESCO Institute in Addis Ababa.

The program became different kind of experience for teacher educators at university level in Ethiopia, as described by some of the participants below. The global influences on educational practice and policy became even more accentuated in Ethiopia than in Namibia. This has been thoroughly analysed in two previous papers (Dahlström, 2007; Dahlström & Lemma, 2008). A description of these global influences is best summarized by one of my colleagues working on the Master programme in Ethiopia:

“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 educationalist you will perhaps for the first time in Africa work with faculty lecturers 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 educationalists 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.” (Callewaert, 2006, p 127)

In a way, we found ourselves in a context once again saturated with hegemonic views that followed the neoliberal marketization of education so eloquently described by Callewaert above. Public education is today further reconfigured globally along neoliberal ideas that are disguised as a freedom discourse while commoditising and privatising public education as a profit-making activity. Management, control, and efficiency as part of what goes under the label New Public Management (NPM) as well as Education for All and Student-centred Education are other hegemonic conceptions that have been reconfigured tools for the same purpose, namely to reform public education as profit making activities. (Tikly, 2004; Tamatea, 2003, Sahlberg, 2010)

Ethiopian educators often refer to the fact that Ethiopia has never been colonised as other African countries, but tend to forget or ignore the present neo-colonisation taking place through global market influences and the global donor machinery following policies of the World Bank conglomerate and transnational advocacy networks (Ball, 2013). I will make a few references to what has been called plasma teachers as an example of how these forces affected education during the period when we worked in Ethiopia from May 2003 to May 2005 and as a way to describe the educational context for our interventions.

The concept plasma teachers, was invented by students and teachers who suffered under the official project Educational Satellite Television Programmes at secondary education in Ethiopia. This programme was introduced under the financial guidance of the World Bank. In

short, it introduced student-centred education through a neo-liberal filter that by-passed the teachers and reduced them to caretakers of plasma screens. The students were reduced to TV screen watchers who more often than not did not manage to follow the messages of the lessons. Another reason for the dysfunction of this type of training, which hardly can be called education, was that the lessons were produced by a South African university, presented by alien South African teachers, and through their alien English accent.

The general impression based on classroom observations and information from teachers was that this innovation to create the officially proclaimed student-centred policy created passivity amongst students as well as teachers. This was a deliberately planned neoliberal reform under the official banner of improvement through efficiency and transparency for good citizenry. It operated through external control and profit and became a demonstration of what can happen with education when it is refigured as a commodity. (Lemma, 2006; Dahlström 2007; Dahlström & Lemma, 2008).

The CPI Master Programme started in this context and was also restricted to recruit university lecturers rather than teacher educators at colleges due to an enforced government instruction. The CPI Master Programme was developed to “empower all participants in whatever their educational circumstances to act on their situations on the basis of critical societal and educational analysis in dialogue with the community” (Callewaert, 2006, p. 128). This ambition was based on a number of tentative postulates that had been developed collectively amongst critical scholars (like Callewaert) and were presented in a position paper for the course.

1. 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. Therefore, there is a need for situational knowledge as an alternative form of knowledge. The concept situational knowledge is used to describe a combination of practical 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.
2. Hence the need 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 turns
3. 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.

4. 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.
5. 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, equal to common sense as interpreted by Gramsci(1971).
6. Hence the importance of a pedagogy that includes critical, historical, and experiential perspectives that avoid reducing education to simplistic and linear relations between teaching and learning.
7. 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 the global South. 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 the knowledge and skills that education generates to enhance social justice.
8. Hence the importance of a radical pedagogy like Critical Practitioner Inquiry (CPI)that acknowledges culture and civil society as integrated fields of educational endeavours.(after Dahlström, 2003)

The CPI Master Programme became a transforming project for many of the course participants as illustrated through their course evaluations as well as other comments. One of the course participants elaborate on the historical relationships between western and African educators and scholars in a spontaneously written comment sent to me after the course (Ali, 2005). Ali starts from a critical view on the influences from colonial as well as post-colonial educational inputs from the North as a way to westernize African education and educators with reference to Rodney (1976), Mazrui (1990), and Ngugi wa Thiongo (1993). He continues by elaborating on the counter-hegemonic traits of the CPI Master programme and the course tutors' inputs during the National Institutes, the physical meeting points between course participants and their tutors. Ali (2005, p. 4) makes the conclusion that the tutors in the CPI programme "have been trying to resuscitate African education by their way to uncover the evil nature of the northern political order but also indicate ways to struggle against it". Furthermore, he expresses that "CPI is indeed a pedagogy of hope for Africa – a pedagogy that could serve as a vehicle for dialogue among cultures and civilizations by paralyzing hegemonies, monopolism, and other stumbling blocks to such a dialogue".

In an article by one of the CPI course participants, Hussein (2006, p. 362) writes that:

"The experiences of the author and other teacher educators with Critical Practitioner Inquiry (CPI), a teacher education program born in the south of Africa to liberate teachers and teacher educators from authoritarian views of knowledge construction.../and/ argues that CPI

encourages practitioners to sense and transform factors that perpetuate injustice and inequality in schools, classrooms, and wider society.”

Other course participants’ evaluated the CPI course in more personal ways:

“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.” (As reported by Dahlström, 2006a)

In the aftermath of the CPI Master programme in Ethiopia there have been on-going discussions on how to transfer the CPI approach to a PhD programme for educators in Ethiopia. In parallel to these discussions the CPI concept moved to a totally different reality, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, commonly known as Laos.

Critical educational perspectives in the midst of unholy alliances

A further outreach of CPI influence on educational theory and practice took place through educational programmes for college and university teachers in Laos during the period 2002 - 2011. Laos is one of the poorest countries in the world and a one-party state led by the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party since independence in 1975. Laos opened up its borders for Western interests, market forces, and donor support as part of a national policy introduced in 1986 called New Economic Mechanism. This coincided with the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

As a consequence, Laos was affected by the global donor community, including the World Bank, IMF, UNESCO as well as national donor organisations from the West. The donor community decided on a global reform effort under the slogan of Education for All in 1990. Therefore, Laos had to adopt this global reform as a consequence of its need for external support.

I will make another contextual reflection before addressing some of the activities and impact of CPI in Laos. This reflection starts from classroom observations carried out at three different locations in Laos, the Faculty of Law and Political Science of the National University of Laos (NUOL) in central Vientiane, the Faculty of Education at NUOL’s major campus at Dongdok in the outskirts of Vientiane, and the so called special school (elite school) attached to the Dongdok campus.

I noted during a lecture at the Faculty of Law and Political Science that students are taught in Political Science lesson that Laos is a socialist and classless society following Marxist-Leninist dogma (Dahlström, 2006b). Social observation while working and living in Laos as well as more formal observations at the Faculty of Education and the elite school did not support that discourse or its practice. On the contrary, strong hierarchical relations and elite thinking was the order of the day. Furthermore, the global policy of education related to Education for All and student-centred education were implemented as the “new method of teaching” under the technical rationality of a 5-pointed star (Bäcktorp, 2007). This new

method of teaching is an imperative western policy that comes with donor support. Furthermore, it has today been influenced by individualistic and market-oriented neoliberal ideas and is as such a strong contrast to the discourse of a socialist and classless society. But obviously, unholy alliances are possible for other purposes.

Plenty of opportunities to carry out critical practitioner inquiries were in place in this contradictory situation, at least at first site based on the initial welcoming situation. Furthermore, it had been decided jointly by donors and the Ministry of Education in Laos that the new method of teaching should be implemented in the educational system through an action research approach.

A merger of the different aspects of CPI that were addressed in Laos is presented in Dahlström (2013a). The overview elaborates on the attempt to create situational understanding and a new narrative of education through CPI. The concept of situational understanding goes back to Elliott (1993), one of the pioneering scholars in the area of action research. Situational understanding was developed to include three areas in the CPI tradition as an outreach from Asplund (1979). These are the discursive, conceptual, and practical areas. Practitioners needed to analyse these areas to understand the forces under which educational processes operated. Such critical inquiries were aiming at an identification of the degrees of freedom available for an educational empowerment towards equity and social justice. Coordinated efforts along these lines contributed to a new narrative of educational development.

The strong influences from the global donor community motivated that many of the studies and practices carried out by Lao educators were related to aspects of modern schooling. For example, one Master student looked at the problematic meeting point between modern schooling and traditional rural life dependent on subsistent farming (Isoutha, 2006). The inquiry found that parents realised the importance of schooling but needed the children to do farm work, while the educational authorities thought that parents were ignorant when they did not send their children to school. There were contradictory discourses as well as conceptions at hand that did not change the practical situation. This situation could be changed when the authorities realised that the parents needed the help of their children at home for survival purposes during planting and harvesting times. Practical solutions could be reached if the children were free from school during the most intensive labour periods or that formal schooling could be rearranged to fit the situation on the ground along ideas of a flexible and socially integrated view on educational practice as well as ideas following a critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003).

A PhD study looked into the national implementation of student-centred education through action research (Bounyasone & Keosada, 2011). This was an extensive study that started in an analysis of global educational influences. The concept hidden cultural policy ensembles was emanated from Ball (2006) and used as a tool to understand how these influences operated. It showed how new educational discourses delivered by foreign consultants created understandings that were different from the intended meanings. The mismatch between

intended and found practices was explained from the different culturally and socially hidden ensembles that operated on both sides in the meeting points between foreign consultants and Lao educators. Another intervening and related complication was created by the mismatch between discourses, conceptions, and expected practices in the form of policy backlashes. The conclusion drawn from the inquiries carried out by Bounyasone & Keosada (2011) is that both student-centred education, i.e. the new way of teaching, and the way through which it was supposed to be implemented, i.e. action research, were reduced to technical rationalities. Student-centred education became group work and action research a formalised report writing for educational administrators.

However, Bounyasone & Keosada (2011) did not stop with these inquiries. They also developed a local approach to CPI called Critical and Educative Action Research Network. This network rested on Bounyasone & Keosada's experiences of CPI and the concepts cross-cultural dialogue (Santos, 2007) and critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003) used in their PhD studies. The network was based on aspects of mindfulness, connectedness, and impermanence with roots in Buddhism. Its educational philosophy rests on the idea that critical learning is enhanced when it is socially related, has a communicative meaning, and is carried out as integrated social activities. Furthermore, it recognised the role of an ecological re-inhabitation and the role of local knowledge and skills in modern schooling as part of a decolonisation process. It was also presented as a reversed network where the flow of knowledge, skills, and critical understanding came from below and the local.

The future will tell us whether the Lao People's Revolutionary Party will allow a popular educational protagonism to develop as a necessary ingredient for a new national agenda that follows the conception of a 'participatory and protagonistic democracy as the fundamental characteristics of the new society we want to build' (Harnecker, 2015, p 163).

The introduction of CPI related pedagogical aspects in Laos did also strengthen the CPI concept per se through related historical and contemporary scholastic work as indicated above. Influences from Santos (2007) and Gruenewald (2003) were accompanied by the early work of Shatskii in Soviet Union as reported by Partlett (2005), and Legrand's (2000) reviving report on the French educator Celestin Freinet. These scholars and others like Connell (2007) alerted the focus on peripheral, forgotten, and marginalised knowledge during the enduring global era of neoliberal influences on educational systems.

A few years later I travelled to Kabul in Afghanistan to introduce a CPI influenced Action Research to a group of Afghan educators.

Afghan educators and a critical approach to Action Research

Critical education does not come into your mind when you think of Afghanistan. Rather the immense human suffering and destruction of both social and material life created by years of external force. The internationally influenced war situation has now officially come to an

end. However, the threats of further violence are still keeping the Afghan people in a straitjacket of security measures almost unthinkable anywhere else in the world.

In the midst of this situation I was asked to introduce action research to a group of Afghan educators in Kabul during 2013. The Afghan educators worked as school consultants in different regions in the country and were employed by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA). They travelled to Kabul for two seminar occasions to take part in the Teachers as Action Researchers Project organised by SCA. I produced a Handbook as a guide to be used during the seminars before my work started in Kabul (Dahlström, 2013b).

The preface of the Handbook referred to SCA's intentions with the project to empower the school consultants as well as members of the teacher association, an embryotic initiative to create a future teachers' union. The introduction of action research was seen as a way to support this broader purpose by creating a platform for public debates. Furthermore, action research was seen as a bridge for "educators to exercise their collective wisdom about education and the teaching profession for the collective good in communities and the society as a whole" (Dahlström, 2013b, p. 4).

The main parts of the Handbook and the first seminar dealt with the participants' professional situation, an introduction to research perspectives, traditions of action research, the essentials of action research, and the documentary process of action research. Each part included also individual activities, group discussions, and the development of guiding documents for future activities.

Even though the Handbook was outlined to include what was thought of as important aspects of action research it was also informed by CPI and its former development. For example, some of the influences from CPI were related to work on constitutive values as well as the need to create a situational understanding through analyses of discourses, conceptions, and practices.

The development of constitutive values gives a good example of the way activities were organised as well as the impact from CPI. This process started on an individual level when the participants outlined what they considered as important qualities and principles on individual, social, and societal levels. These qualities and principles were then negotiated at group levels before a common conceptual map was developed as an integration of the negotiated findings. The concept map was then transformed to a list of agreed constitutive values that was outlined to direct future inquiries. The list of the constructed constitutive values included:

- Respect established norms that support humanistic constitutive values in the society.
- Respect the right of opinions and beliefs.
- Create situations of mental and physical security.
- Create situations of mutual respect and bright mindedness.
- Create a critical understanding of globalisations.

- Create a positive approach to life by seeing opportunities.
- Create learning opportunities based on honesty and tolerance.
- Create learning opportunities based on good communication and the ability of listening. (after Dahlström, 2013b)

The continuation included work to create a tentative focal point for the inquiries and preparations for analysis to create situational understandings of the sites where the actions were going to be taken. The group of nineteen (19) participants that pioneered in this first attempt to institutionalise a critical action research approach in Afghanistan carried out nine collective projects based on the constitutive values and reported at a Conference in Kabul on the 4th of February, 2014, to invited representative from the Ministry of Education in Kabul, other non-government organisations, Heads of SCA Provincial Project Offices, as well as members from SCA's Management Office in Kabul.

Further work are envisaged to include the finalising and publication of the inquiries as a collective publication eventually integrated with information and guidelines that can support Afghan educators to continue their efforts to improve education in Afghanistan through CPI as a progressive form of action research. However, the future of a CPI inspired model of action research is, as everything else in Afghanistan, depending on a save and secured society developed on its own merits in line with the constitutive values of the inquiries.

A new paradigm in the making and networks in the Global South

This narrative is an attempt to illustrate how educational ideas and practices can develop from local attempts carried out by educators in cooperation, inspired and supported by scholastic thinking. Furthermore, it is an illustration of how the role of prolonged development works in times when a historical perspective is lost through the emphasis on instant flows, consumerism, and control. Even though change is an integrated part of life as expressed in Buddhism through the concept of impermanence, it is also historically based.

Critical Practitioner Inquiry started as an attempt to move the preferential right of interpretation closer to practitioners and to create a broader understanding of the role of education in society beyond the classroom doors and lecture halls. This also challenged traditional intellectual power and supported a counter-hegemonic power of organic intellectuals.

The CPI concept has been developed and adapted to situations at hand still being faithful to its basic idea of a critical perspective and solidarity. CPI can thereby avoid the dogmatic and taken for granted approaches that commonly are the characteristics of western policy ensembles exported to the global South. External agendas beyond official goals of donor support are frequent in countries that are dependent on external finance. Therefore, the colonial spectres are still haunting the capitalist development paradigm as a cure against poverty and so called backwardness in the global South. The time when education was seen as an emancipatory activity has now been replaced by the entrepreneurial saints of

individualism and marketizations along with the global neoliberal influences that Amin (2004) calls the liberal virus.

Many scholars and solidarity groups in the North as well as in the South have indicated the urgency of a new global view on development. For example, Piketty (2014) has shown how the structures of inequality have accelerated global and local differences. International organisations like OXFAM (<https://www.oxfam.org/>) have pointed to the global divide between the haves and the have-nots or what is called the 1% and the 99%. Capitalist development is often politically marketed through a trickling down effect that eventually will distribute fortunes to all. The failure of this effect has instead created new lumpen proletariats given different names like ‘the poors’ (Desai, 2002), ‘chavs’ (Jones, 2011) and ‘the precariat’ (Standing, 2011). Furthermore, Klein (2014) has recently shown how capitalism is creating devastating climate changes especially vulnerable to the poor.

The need for a new development paradigm goes together with a new view on education beyond the present agenda taken for granted in the West and exported unchallenged to the Global South.

CPI has been developed as a force to induct an emancipatory paradigm against the present onslaught on public education (Compton & Weiner, 2008). The urgency to introduce an alternative development and education paradigm is needed globally. A new paradigm is most pressing in the global South where severe human tragedies are taking place today due to neoliberalism and robber capitalism.

There are today some practical and scholastic efforts that base their work on South-oriented perspectives. These efforts are together indications of a new development and educational paradigm. For example, the Alice Project is drawing on Epistemologies of the South proposed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (<http://alice.ces.uc.pt>). Another newly established network is the Southern Perspectives (<http://www.southernperspectives.net>) that is promoting ways of thinking that are counter hegemonic and outside trans-Atlantic metropolitan centres.

The Global South Network (www.globalsouthnetwork.org) is our own website for the development of Critical Practitioner Inquiry for Educators established by a group of concerned educators. The Global South Network is based on solidarity with educators and people in the Global South. The goal is to develop more humane educational systems for all through approaches like critical practitioner inquiry. As the introduction to the website says:

“The Global South Network (GSN) Critical Practitioner Inquiry for Educators has developed from educational work in the global South. This work has shown that there is room for approaches that foster a different future beyond the present global hegemony of neo-liberal and conservative agendas in all aspects of life including education.

The Global South Network is an attempt to empower educators and scholars in the South through approaches that acknowledge practitioners’ preferential right of interpretation over educational practice. For that purpose Critical Practitioner Inquiry (CPI) is developed as a way

to combine analyses of practice and policy with an emerging scholastic perspective in pursuit of social and economic justice globally.”

The GSN website is also a place for critical reflections on local situations at the Global South Network Bulletin that invites critical educators to share their reflections on social stigma as well as positive alternative practices.

Looking back at the narrative presented in this text I recognize a stubborn effort to do something different and to think differently and critically. The CPI concept became a carrier of this difference that also developed organically thanks to contextual issues. A different context contributed with something new still being faithful to a critical and humanistic pedagogy of solidarity beyond the mainstream. A re-emancipatory and re-enlightening vision of pedagogy in a better world for all is still alive.

Is there a new and different developmental and educational paradigm in the making? We can eventually identify some paradigmatic patterns emerging, but in principle most of us, educators and students alike, are still suffering under the effects of the present neoliberal and capitalist hegemony.

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¹The subheading for this part of the paper refers a metaphor that has travelled with me since the 1970s. It is based on a story told by the French educator Celestin Freinet titled “Eagles do not walk the stairs”. The story is a critical reflection over the type of educational practices that today can be compared to ‘outcome-based education’ and what Callewaert calls ‘education by neoliberal management’. The story has been translated and published in the Reform Forum, a journal reflecting the post-apartheid reform efforts in Namibia after 1990 and also published in an article in the International Journal of Progressive Education (Dahlström, 1994; Dahlström, 2007).

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