The ambiguous politics of teachers in the reconstruction of Iraq

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Abstract

The opportunity to rebuild community after conflict requires rapid responses to reinstall key institutions. This paper examines the role of educators in the reconstruction of educational systems and in the rebuilding of community through a case study of Iraq. While ongoing conflict continues in Iraq, reconstruction efforts persist through large scale infrastructure and institutional rebuilding that aims to bring stability to political, legal and financial systems. The interim Iraqi government, given sovereignty on June 28, 2004, continues to support the road map underpinning rebuilding efforts in Post-Saddam Iraq.[1] The restructuring of education systems is a cornerstone of rebuilding efforts since an intact and functioning education system complements other social and economic transformations, rebuilds social relations and instigates a routine normalcy to post conflict communities . The paper problematises rebuilding efforts through critical policy analysis that questions the nature of policy, how assistance is constructed and the ambiguous political role of educators in educational rebuilding.

New policy and new education

Analysing educational policy dealing with the current context of Iraq provides a challenge to the education researcher. The search for information from which to critically evaluate educational policy and practice in this current situation is limited as is reflective material dealing with educational intervention in conflict situations. Davies similarly states that,

the link between conflict and education is a grossly under-analysed area. This is not surprising, as it is uncomfortable for policymakers and curriculum developers. It is safer to focus on literacy and numeracy, on the number of desks and the achievement of measurable targets.

The information from press releases, policy documents from international aid agencies such as USAID, and governmental reports are presented as uncontested achievements of educational and social rebuilding. However, rebuilding whole communities after conflict is a chaotic and trouble ridden process that brings into play a conundrum of social and cultural issues as rebuilding shifts from immediate relief to longer term reconstruction.

In order to enhance understanding of the roadmap of reconstruction and to critically evaluate the policy stances driving urgent rebuilding efforts, it is necessary to understand what is incorporated in the process and who is involved. For example, the contract to rebuild primary and secondary education has been outsourced by USAID to Creative Associates International for $ US 37.9million. As education researchers we need to ask questions about those responsible for educational rebuilding and the strategic role they occupy in redesigning education. In order to reduce academic lag in this critical field, the researcher positions the work of educational policy analysis as a public interest and argues that as public intellectuals, educational researchers have responsibility to critically evaluate educational policy in the making and from sources available. Therefore, this paper raises issues and probematises the developments of education policy in Iraq and the strategic role of educational actors reconstructing the new regime in Iraq.

Uncovering Politics and Power in Reconstruction Policies

Education policy has been extensively defined as a part of a process that controls educational development, as a complex process that allocates values, as ways to legitimize political decisions and as the fusion of social, political and economic interests . However, a more pragmatic definition comes from the World Bank, which defines policy as sets of guidelines controlling how monies are allocated and the process that would be put into place to disburse monies. The World Bank definition of policy suggests that policy enables infrastructure, supports specific goals and outcomes, checks work and money flows, and ensures some quality control. This

functional definition of policy focuses on the outcomes and achievements of distributed funds rather than arguing for particular value-based positions. When examining reconstruction progress in Iraq, the largest lender of reconstruction monies for education is USAID. Under the banner of security, democracy and prosperity, the Strategic Plan 2004-2009 states:

> ... The United States will work side-by-side with the Iraqi people to build a free, democratic, and stable Iraq ... Our goals are for Iraqis to take full control of their country as soon as possible and to maintain its territorial integrity. We will assist the Iraqi people in their efforts to adopt a new constitution, hold elections, and build a legitimate government based on the consent of the governed and respect for the human rights of all Iraqis

Under the broad agenda for stability and democracy, reconstruction policy is viewed as 'assistance', that is, assistance to achieve stability and democracy through financial support of key infrastructure and institution building. Considering USAID is primarily a funding agency then the term 'assistance' represents monetary aid used to rebuild governing institutions.

The strategic assistance reads like fact sheets of outcomes and expenditure while the ideological constructs of democracy and stability are presented as uncontested values. Policy highlights the outcomes of monetary assistance and the impact this makes on social rebuilding. Monetary aid in educational rebuilding includes,

> ... Over 2,405 schools have been rehabilitated, 33,000 secondary school teachers trained and 8.7 million textbooks printed and distributed.

> ... Twenty-five Fulbright grantees and over 20 Iraqi high school students are studying in U.S. educational institutions. ... The first "American Corner" opened in Iraq, including hundreds of books about the U.S., a video and DVD library, Internet connected computers and videoconferencing capabilities.

By focusing on policy as a way to guide the distribution of monies and not contesting the underlying values, a confident vision of reconstruction and achievement is presented.

Rebuilding education

That education plays a critical role in social transformation is not a new concept. However, Post-Saddam Iraq presents policy makers with an opportunity for social and

civic reconstruction where transformative capacity of education is fully exploited. Reconstruction literature stresses the importance of rebuilding education as a way to assist social rebuilding. Tawil explores conflict situations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Guatemala, Lebanon and Mozambique, Northern Ireland, Rwanda and Sri Lanka arguing that meaningful reforms need to unpack the complex relations between school, society and change. Duggan's experience of the reconstruction of the Cambodian education system is interesting to consider. In that case, reconstruction of the education sector created a culture of economic and social dependency of those seeking assistance. Duggan and recent work by the author have demonstrated how the economic interests of global organizations impact on the restructuring of national education systems. The World Bank's lending policies, conditional on specific structural changes, have been severely criticized by educators and researchers. In the case of US assistance to Iraq, consider the assistance of USAID with its two pronged policy that assists but also dominates:

> USAID's Year 1 Education Program—worth $74 million through primary education activities and approximately $70 million through secondary education activities—employs a dual strategy that focuses on emergency actions to support the resumption of schools while laying the foundations for critical reforms to ensure that the education system and schools can play a constructive role in rebuilding social cohesion and progress in Iraq (USAID, 2003c).

There is no doubt that aid in rebuilding education systems is critical to any nation or community after disruption, however the policy of rebuilding and 'laying foundations for critical reforms' presume particular forms of cohesion and progress.

USAID has clear visions about the purpose and role of education that are all encompassing:

> USAID's goals are to increase enrollment and improve the quality of primary and secondary education, ensure that classrooms have sufficient materials, facilitate community involvement, train teachers, implement accelerated learning programs, and establish partnerships between U.S. and Iraqi colleges and universities (USAID, 2003a).

Who can argue with the organization able to resource such aspirations for educational reforms? But what is disconcerting is the way the legitimacy to rebuild is synonymous with particular visions about education and society. The way change is

justified by USAID policy statements glosses over key political points about the past. Consider the following:

> *Under Saddam Hussein's regime, a whole generation of Iraqis grew up disconnected from the rest of the world. Unemployment and low salaries forced Iraqis to abandon professional jobs and accept menial labor. Professional talent declined in health, private enterprise and education. Economic conditions led to poor labor efficiency where the available labor pool was ill-matched to economic opportunity. This mismatch led to poor economic and social returns on education (USAID, 2003a).*

The damage of US led sanctions and their devastating impact of the Iraqi education systems are conveniently ignored (UNESCO, 2003). Instead, USAID policy, couched in the language of economic opportunity and returns, states that under the old regime education contributed to poor economic and social conditions, while new educational directives stress global connectedness, match intellectual labor with opportunity, associate education with private enterprise, and define educators as part of critical professional talent.

The way that reengineered education systems and money-based policies seek to enact change, presume a particular type of engagement between institutions and their public. In other words, policy presumes particular values as being uncontested in integrity and meaning. Policy simply guides monies in order to embed and enact these values through the educational reconstruction.

In such a conflict ridden situation as Iraq, the policy makers, those who can control and guide monies seem to have domination over the shape and redesign of a vital institution such as education. Programs of rebuilding, dominated by considerable amounts of monies and accountabilities, bring to the fore political issues concerned with power and rights.

The nature of the relationship between those assisting and those accepting assistance presumes disproportionate power relations. Therefore, while the assistance policies may appear as responses to urgency, they also do involve political assertions of power. When Aid agencies present values as uncontested, that is, without justification and negotiation, alongside an operational view of policy while assuming a position of

benevolent assistance, the political positioning of aid agencies becomes more difficult to critically evaluate in the context of the urgent politics of reconstruction. Dependent nations and peoples are held over a barrel and in their state of urgent need of assistance, prudent questions give way to corroboration that enacts the full consequences of policy. A new form of imperialism and colonialism becomes evident.

The symbolic theatre of policy

Recently, Smith et al (2004) suggested that educational policy is a kind of theatre where symbolic politics are on show (Smith et al., 2004). The symbolic gestures are those which pay lip service to values such as democracy, while the reality of marginalisation and unfair patterns of distribution ensures that exclusion continues to be the lived experiences of a significant number. The notions of symbolic policy and politics resonate with the rebuilding of education where US government information does not provide a coherent educational policy position that legitimizes how values are allocated. In an online journal issued by the US Department of State that outlines foreign policy, the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs states, "Peace, prosperity, and freedom -- these fundamental principles fuel the unique form of foreign policy known as American internationalism" (Holmes, 2003.). There are many overlaps between American Internationalism and the embedded and uncontested values driving educational reconstruction in Iraq.

The symbolic role of policy brings to the fore values of peace, prosperity and freedom as fundamental values that constitute American Internationalism underpinning strategic plans for rebuilding in Iraq. The implication is that institutions are rebuilt in order to implement the American values of peace, prosperity and freedom even though these political values are problematic in that they have multimeanings. In practice, the values espoused in Holmes' theatrical announcement are made evident in balance sheet measures of success. Therefore, the revision of 8.7 million science and mathematics text books is recorded as an achievement under the heading of Institutional Strengthening (USAID, 2004a). One can assume that the policy logic presumes that a certain type of science and math knowledge helps to create peace, prosperity and freedom although this link is not sufficiently explicit. One presumes

that institutions are deemed strengthened when the values of American Internationalism underlie institutional capacity building.

The rebuilding of institutions such as education raises questions about the purpose of education policy and how the purpose becomes legitimized. Who gives authority for new, 'rehabilitated' schools so they are made operational? Tawil (2004) emphasizes that education can become a catalyst for a breakdown in social cohesion unless the relationship between the assistance and the dependent parties are examined. Bush and Salterelli (2000) questioned whether education is invariably a good force. They conclude that education can either contribute or detract from peace-building depending on how it is used in creating new social relationships. For example, they highlight how education can be used as a cultural weapon that inhibits real democracy. Such concerns about the role of education are vital to this discussion because how education is reconstructed has implications for the enactment of particular values and beliefs.

Key Operators: Educators' ambiguous politics

If policy focusses on operations, and the values of policy remain uncontested, who are the operators implementing policy? Educators have a history of political involvement (Connell, 1995; Giroux, 1983; Hargreaves, 1994; Kaplan, 1996; Lawn, 1987). Bush and Salterelli state that reconstruction is about creating new social relationships. Part of this is achieved when reconstruction policy dismisses education of the past, the old regime, while promoting a glowing future afforded by the new educational directives. In addition, new social relationships are created through redesigning the work of major actors in the new stage of reconstruction. Educators are critical professional talent and this is evident when analysing how reconstruction policy engages teachers and shapes practices.

The return of teachers to school and classrooms in Iraq is a symbolic and practical measure of a beginning of new social routine in Post-Saddam Iraq. Opening schools and educational institutions is seen by the media as a return to routine normalcy for parents, children, students and subsidiary industries that support education. For example, in the Iraqi conflict, schooling was resumed in 2003, well before the conflict

situation and social and economic stability looked like being achieved. On Wednesday, 7 April, 2004, the BBC news reported that,

> School attendance has risen from 60% directly after the war to more than 95% in this year's national exam week, according to UNICEF. But much work remains to be done to restore the country's crumbling, overcrowded classrooms (BBC, 2004).

In this case, the educator becomes critical professional talent that enables the beginning of a new continuity in post-conflict life. Teachers are important symbolic actors because they represent new beginnings. A press release from the White House pronounced the return of teachers to the classroom as a political victory for the occupying powers. The press release, *Iraqi Teachers Returning to Work,* states:

> Iraqi teachers who were persecuted for their political beliefs during Saddam's regime are finally returning to their chosen professions. Approximately 15,000 teachers were fired by Saddam's regime for political reasons, including relatives of Iraqis who were executed, exiled, or imprisoned. To date, 4,700 have been re-hired by the Ministry of Education and 1,100 more will be rehired in the next few days(CoalitionProvisionalAuthority, 2004).

What is revealing about the rhetoric of the press release is the ambiguity of the teachers' position. Clearly, there is a return of some form of politically active teacher since they were expelled from teaching due to their political beliefs. However, another political process in also underway. Consider the following,

> In addition, the Ministries of Education and Higher Education and the Supreme National De-Ba'athification Commission, are working to ensure that the de-Ba'athification appeals process is accelerated and implemented fairly and efficiently. Securing the best possible teachers for Iraq's youth is vital to the future of freedom and prosperity in the new Iraq (Coalition Provisional Authority, 2004).

Teachers are also being repoliticized if only to expunge Ba'athist beliefs.   Its ambiguous policy that implies the return of political actors to the classroom, however, the implication is that teachers will lose their Ba'athist beliefs and as such assume a depoliticized role in the rebuilding of education.

Why so much fuss about hiring and firing of teachers? It makes for great drama and theatre. Further reports vary as to how many teachers were sacked by the US administrators for being aligned to the previous regime and then how many were

rehired in the new climate. Indeed, reports hint that the same cohort of teachers went through the firing and re-hiring causing anti-American sentiments. Consequently, in the spirit of inclusion and democracy, the rehiring of teachers was publicized as a step towards rebuilding social identity, unity and the graduation of Iraq's sovereign powers in determining national policy.

It may appear as a gracious act to rehire politically minded teachers, conditional on their de Ba'athicication of course, however, there was another underlying motive that consolidates the reduced power of a depoliticized educator. Policy makers changed tact based on the assessment that depoliticized teachers really do not have political persuasive powers over students, "Teachers don't have the power to convert a classroom of kids" (Asquith, 2004).

The quote by Asquith is critical to consider. Most significantly Asquith conceptualizes teachers' role as classroom based. Education policy further substantiates this purpose when considering policy aimed at outlining a new era for teacher training.

Teacher training largely funded by USAID, targets teachers' re-education through training programs underpinned by concepts like leadership, critical thinking, mutual respect, freedom of expression and team work. The workshops for professional Iraqi teachers included lesson planning, classroom management, learning strategies, performance and measurement, punishment and reward and parent-school partnerships. Unfortunately, with the de-Ba'athification of teachers, there appears to be a presumption that teachers have also lost their professional skills. The training programs emphasize classroom practice, teaching skills and management techniques (Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003).

What is evident from the training workshops is the dominant discourse about teachers' work which reframes and rationalises their work within the parameters of quality control and accountability. Teachers' technical knowledge about student learning and evaluation, effective lesson planning and class room management defines the professional in the new context.   For example, USAID assistance programs include "64,000 of Iraq's secondary school teachers will participate in training

courses on student centered learning and improved teaching methods" (USAID, 2003b). When conflict resides in values and attitudes of the society, education policy calls for classroom practices divorces from social reality.

There are significant omissions from teacher retraining programs. Firstly, the emotional labour of teachers' work in a conflict situation is not addressed in sufficient social theory. While policy statements and strategic plans outline the need to retrain teachers in new methods, there is little evidence about preparing teachers for the social and cultural issues that may underpin discontinuity of cultural practices and the introduction of a new sort of normalcy. Experiences from the rebuilding of Bosnia and Herzegovina showed that many students suffered from "flashbacks, nightmares, lack of concentration, aggressive behaviour and poor performance in school" (World Bank, 2004). However, training and professional development dealing with post conflict trauma or the new political landscape in post conflict communities is not apparent in the new training. How does a teacher explain new text books, new knowledge, amongst thousands killed and traumatised?

According to Fevre,(2000) the overt use of educators as emotional labour increases professional uncertainty because there is an educative focus on individualism and personal development that decontextualises the education from broader social and political context. Educators are encouraged to construct identity for themselves and their students, as individualized, emotional and introspective not as a way to form a politicized or social understanding of who we are. Pupuvac cited in Eccelstone (2004) explored the work of aid agencies in post war situations that rely on a therapeutic ethos to address children's distress. Her argument is that aid agencies are pre-occupied with self-analysis and self-esteem issues that reflect American culture. She suggests that rather than building social theory that explores people's capacity for agency, aid agencies shift focus from issues such as inequality in education to how people feel about it. A highlighted quote in a policy brief (USAID, 2003c) illustrates this point:

> It's the first time in the history of teacher training in Iraq that a trained teacher has trained his supervisors. This is very new to us and frankly it has given us value and improved self-esteem.'–USAID Baghdad teacher training participant (USAID, 2003c:1).

Although the details of training need to be explored further, the new knowledge and relationships promoted through training no doubt provide Iraqi educators with new ways of working. What is interesting to consider is the omission of political discussions and conversations from training programs so that the emotional work of teachers is socially and culturally examined to ensure that social theory can be built into reforms. When examining the teacher training programs of the Post-Saddam regime, the depoliticization of teachers is paramount as shown by the de-Ba'athification. The depoliticization appears to be compounded by professional development programs that decontextualize education and educators from unpacking social and political change as part of their role. The closest that training addresses the politics of education in the training programs is called "community-parent school relationships" (USAID, 2003c:2), although the content is not spelt out. As stated by Tawil (2004) "in order to ensure that processes of education reform are meaningful contributions to reconciliation and peace-building, the subtle and complex relationships between schooling and conflict need to be explicitly recognised and examined"(introduction).

The retraining programs suggest that a new type of depoliticized or repoliticized educator is being reproduced. The US instigated the de-Ba'athification of teachers, re-educating teachers to take on new identity that breaks from the previous political attitudes but nevertheless takes on values and actions of the new regime. The re-education of teachers, along with the re-skilling, retraining and greater supervision, deploys teachers in the rehabilitated classrooms which become their stage. Within the changing curriculum paradigms and justifications, within new notions of national identity and civic cohesion, within new multicultural policies, and reinterpretation of history and destiny, teachers are left out of the debate. Simply put, teachers and their repoliticized identity and role reduces teacher involvement in meaningful contributions to civic and social political issues. The Coalition Provisional Authority states, "…The politicization of education, which requires filtering out political pressure, propaganda, and violent tendencies from the curriculum" (Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003). In effect, teachers' politics have been filtered out of policy and educational rebuilding.

The new policy from the governing regime sanctions a new stage for educators where politics are associated with propaganda and violence and thus removed from the curriculum. But, the idea that politics is a way to understand power and ensure representation is not raised so that ruling politics are left to those in governing positions, those who have money to guide and shape rebuilding. In this type of policy making, teachers' identity and capacity for political and social dialogue is negated. The depoliticizing of teachers reflects a managerialist approach to policy and social change, whereby governing agents have the power to delineate roles and responsibilities. Despite being 'critical professional talent', educators are constructed as character players in the theatre of change. The educators' view of what constitutes knowledge, truth and practice in education is diminished as their role is reshaped with new skills and training that entrenched prescriptive classroom practices. Ultimately, what is also diminished is the capacity to unmask the traps and domination of particular powers and versions of the truth that would be embedded in a political role for educators. By complying with a new, depoliticized practice, Iraqi educators are surrendering their social capacity that is a key part of teachers' work and identity.

Educators as agents of social cohesion and justice

In 2003, I conducted research that attempted to show the concerns of educators when asked about their experiences of teaching in the global economy (Vongalis, 2003b; Vongalis & Seddon, 2001). The diagram below illustrates the themes that emerged as key concerns of teachers who were educating in a global economy.
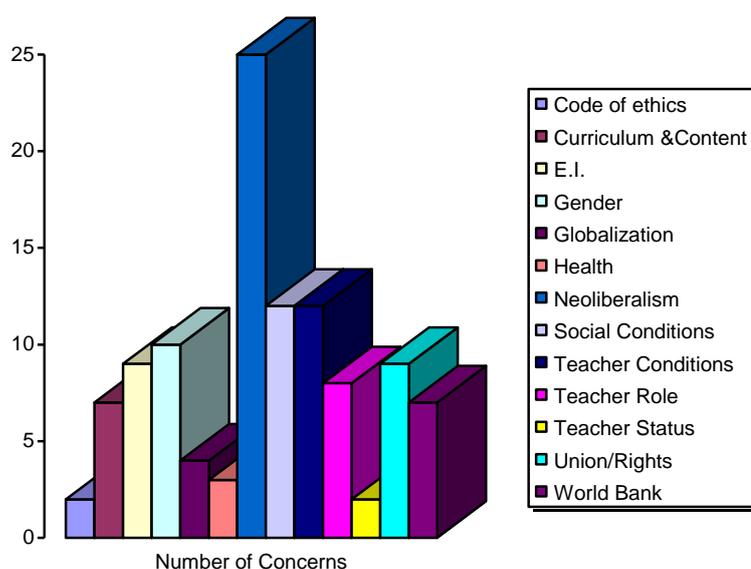
Upon closer examination of the emerging themes from teachers' discourse, what became evident is the way that teachers contextualized their work within the broader social context. Teaching practice is being shaped by social, economic and political forces to which educators seek to respond. Educators locate their work and current practices within the broader social context of their communities. As the graph illustrates, teachers are concerned about deteriorating health and social conditions, the plight of education as a private enterprise, and how global economics have changed education. This concern is demonstrated by teachers from developed and developing countries and has been further developed in another publication (Vongalis, 2004). Teachers' professional role is not only that of a class room practitioner, but also, of a critical professional who has a social conscience, social obligations and responsibilities.

Rebuilding the education system in Iraq provides the opportunity to reconceptualize and revive education. The cognate discourse about educational change and revival in Iraq represents a distinct view about the way education needs to be revived. New policy directives that reflect assistance based on USAID model of education introduce education that depoliticizes teachers and then re-politicizes them as practitioners of new managerial practices. Reconstruction policy presents one version of education as a 'good force' and from the way that teachers are repoliticized as neutral facilitators, there are concerns about whether this type of decontexualized educational reconstruction addresses the social and cultural issues arising from a war torn context. There are alternatives which should be explored for the sake of long term peace building.

Rather than employing teachers as social agents, who can raise awareness, participate in cross cultural/ethnic dialogues, address the politics of change, conduct advocacy work and promote public dialogue about the public good of education, teachers are left solidly in the classroom.   It suggests that the disengagement of teachers, from the social and political context, runs contrary to more progressive policy that seeks to reengage teachers in more socially constructive ways.

There are deficiencies in the managerial model of education that de(re)politicizes teachers' role and reorientates learning away from a critical reflection of social

context. For instance, according to an Iraqi Observatory adviser, "Unless you use the terms "occupation" and "colonialism," he said at that time, you aren't really addressing the present dynamic in Iraq" (Quilty, 2003). This point is developed by Keith Watenpaugh, who states,

> The United States plans to continue to deploy U.S. Agency for International Development grants to link the United States and Iraqi institutions. (The first round of agency subcontracts awarded $5.1 million to five American universities and consortia.) Such programs have the potential to help Iraqis rebuild their educational system. But if Iraqis see the programs as part of an American agenda, their role is doubtful in the creation of permanent, collegial, and productive relations between the U.S. and Iraqi academic communities" (Watenpaugh, 2004).

Critical insights into US based Iraqi policy, as shown by Quilty and Watenpaugh, are welcome as they are scarce. Their concerns raise the issue about how to reconstruct education so that Iraqi input is genuine and effective. Education need not be used as a cultural weapon (Bush & Salterelli, 2000) if instead the Iraqi experience of education addresses the contentious issues of war and history, ethnic identities and divides, governance and conflict. By not addressing ethnic divides, embedding awareness raising programs and cross sectorial dialogue, (ethnic, culture, class and gender) into political solutions for education reform, the new education policy is removed from the reality of the complex social context. Anecdotal evidence, from teachers working in the Balkans and reunified Germany, attests to the feelings of alienation experienced by teachers working with complex social and cultural tensions that were not addressed through the curriculum and practice[2]. Without acknowledging the complexity of how education and schooling is tied to building social cohesion, there is a danger that education becomes a disengaged institution that is disconnected from the concerns of community and society.

Education can present an alternative discourse to managerial structures provided that it is not co-opted by powers that seek to reshape institutional relationships, control ways of thinking and acting and embed rules and regulations that legitimize the co-opted version of education. There are resistant voices in Iraq who question the path of reconstruction. For instance, in the case of Iraq, social agents problematize the current reforms.

> "We don't want to advance American interest in Iraq but where those interests coincide with what is positive and progressive for Iraq – development, technical investment, investment in human capital – there's no reason to oppose this just for the sake of opposition. "We're trying to navigate between a rejectionism and collaboration"(Quilty, 2003).

Critical voices raise concerns about governance and policy and whether it represents the needs and interests of the Iraqi people.

But one set of agents is conspicuously silent in this debate. Ideally, critical agents in the dilemma between rejectionism of the incoming power and collaboration with new ways of educating are the educators themselves. It is the educators who can implement a relevant form of transformative practice that blends the new with the concerns from the past. But this is only possible if teachers are given a greater role to play in making decisions about policies. Rather than being marginal actors, who nevertheless stage the policy, teachers can ensure a continuity of educational practice that emphasizes long term peace-building. At issue here is that educational policies and reconstruction offer real choices for the Iraqi people. The idea that those with the funds and means should control reconstruction policy creates new sense of cultural imposition and cultural imperialism. Alternatives to the USAID vision may mean that training teachers in social and political education practices that politicize learning as a way to move from the conflict towards a post conflict education that aims to understand that what has come before is important to comprehend. This training draws on progressive pedagogies that critically frame learning and teaching. Empowering teachers with progressive pedagogies means that they have a richer choice of strategies other than those managerial practice-based strategies, to embed the idea of education as a good force and not simply a utilitarian tool.

An example of Reconciliation Pedagogy using a Resistance Model teaching was undertaken by the Education for Social Justice Research Group, University of South Australia in 2003 (Lester-Irabinna, Tur, & Rigney, 2003). Their project sought to develop and research a model for teaching which engaged participants in the struggle for social justice in education and society. The utilisation of a Gramscian approach to resistance informed the project team as it sought to actively engage participants as 'agents in the struggle' against injustice (Lester-Irabinna et al., 2003). The

underpinning principles were based on the process for unmasking power, language, culture and history to the practice of education and unpacking the different kinds of 'knowing' or different versions of the truth.

The content of teacher training went beyond the management of learning, but focused on the social and community issues that underpin conflict. The educators' role was to explain and tackle the issues using a social justice framework that leads to positive actions and consciousness-raising. The educator is therefore embedded in the broader social and political policies and practices that seek to discontinue inequalities at their structural and cultural sources. This includes the identification of structures and ideologies which create unequal educational outcomes and inhibit the role that education might play in a broader political struggle(Lester-Irabinna et al., 2003). As an embedded social group, teachers can make specific political demands for peace, human rights, education rights, children's rights and so on. As educated professionals embedded in the social, cultural and class dynamics, they can negotiate on behalf of marginalized, disadvantaged groups and dislocated groups with government or governance organizations to politicize the experiences of groups of people and ensure representation at the highest levels. Teachers can negotiate policy reforms for the inclusion of marginalized groups into the political processes. This type of political lobbying pressures power groups to make concessions and redefine political representation and ensure that policy rhetoric delivers equity, access and opportunity through education.

However, the *real politik* of reconstruction looks more like the RISE program (IraqFoundation, 2004). The Revitalization of Iraqi Schools and Stabilization of Education (RISE) program includes topics such as tolerance, conflict reduction and resolution, trauma reduction, nutrition and basic health skills. It also includes professional development about child-centered education, active learning, participatory techniques and peer learning. The RISE discourse centres on program management and deficit learning for teachers in techniques of teaching. The functional paradigm that redesigns education clearly steers away from exposing conflict laden context, the historical positioning of teachers in this context, and steers away from pedagogy for the unmasking power, language, culture and history. In

other words, teacher training steers away from such words as 'colonization', and 'occupation'.

The discourse of teacher training and education rebuilding policy redefines teachers' practice as classroom based. The locus of educational reconceptualization and rebuilding are far removed from the agential capacity of teachers so that educators become the recipients of training, assistance, to change their classroom practices. Instead of fostering teachers' 'deeper engagement' in the light of the community struggle to create better education systems, educators become the enforcers of the new education regime and a new form of power that colonizes education.

A central objective of educators is to ensure that questions about social justice and ethics remain central to educational opportunity. However, when analyzing the role of educators in the rebuilding of Iraq where critical issues of identity, power and independence are central to social and educational debates, teachers are in danger of becoming strategic agents for new power structures. As educators and researchers, conversations that contest the domination of education rebuilding by powerful funding agencies needs to be ongoing in order to show that there are other ways to rebuild education and communities and in which educators can assume a more politically aware role.

Research examining the current conflict in Iraq is difficult to locate. Education research has proven to be even more difficult to access. These limitations point to the fact that more research needs to be undertaken in this area in order to shape the theory and practice of educational rebuilding. There is potential for educators to be progressive and transformative agents in the rebuilding of education systems. However, as illustrated by the case of Iraq, the rebuilding of education becomes a stage for embedding set of uncontested political and disciplinary practices that consolidates the new regime. The way that policy is constructed as operational plans of powerful funding agencies suggests that new education systems are means by which the Post-Saddam regime establishes governance, control and regulation over a key social institution and its agents. Policy becomes a theatre through which values are espoused by those controlling funding and having the capacity to determine the course of reconstruction. Through the discourse and practice of managerialist based

re-training and with the absence of political reading of change, teachers, go through their own process of policitization, depoliticization and repoliticization as critical actors in reconstruction policies. However, with a real lack of power to offer alternative visions of reconstruction, the rebuilding of communities that appears to have more in common with colonization rather than liberation.

Notes

1. The interim Iraqi government has set a date of 30 January 2005 for its first nationwide election.

2. This paper was originally presented at the European Education Research Conference, Crete 2004. The audience discussion revealed teachers' experiences and the issues they had in shaping new curriculum and practices.

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