

# **Locating the value conflicts between the rhetoric and practices of the public and teacher education in Ethiopia within the hegemony of the global neo-liberalism and seeking the alternative in critical pedagogy**

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## **Abstract**

*In this paper, I analyze the value conflicts in the rhetoric and practices of the public and teacher education in the country by locating them within the global neo-liberalism. The data required for the study was collected from the Faculty of Education at Haramaya University. The paper stresses that we must adapt the language of critique and possibility to face up to the wave of neo-liberalism that is shattering the quality and objectives of education in the country. It is difficult to deal with neo-liberal agendas and their variegated local manifestations without having a critical teacher educator force. The paper calls for a new overhaul in teacher education practice. This is a teacher education practice that encourages teachers and teacher educators to radicalize the potentially detrimental effects of neo-liberal ideology. When and how this happens in this country is what the future answers.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is a practice of freedom. This means, it is not and should not be a process of adapting oneself to the status quo, for example, to the 'culturally positioned essentialisms' (Bell & Russell, 2000, p. 191). It has to do with individuality, subjectivity and social agency; it should normally be understood within broader socio-historical and political context and should be defined as a socio-historical and political practice (Biesta, 2003, p. 144). If something is education, it must enable the learner to arrive at how cultural and economic forces and schools perpetuate the operation of 'people and create, recreate, and legitimate an unequal, unjust and undemocratic society' (Heilman, 2003, p. 115).

However, many factors block the potential role of education to develop a more democratic and informed society. In our current world, neo-liberalism, which appears under different guises, is one of such factors. The shake of this ideological quake is shattering the 'goals, motivations, methods, standards of excellence and standards of freedom in education' across the world (Hill, 2003). Elsewhere, Hill (2005) stresses that with the supremacy of neo-liberalism: 'Education and humanity itself has become increasingly commodified, with education being restructured internationally under pressure from international capitalist organizations and compliant governments.' Educational institutions' missions are subjected to the savage attacks of this corporate ideology (Porfilio & Yu, 2006). As Jarvis (1995) states 'education has become a marketable commodity like other commodities, and that educational institutions are more like other commercial organizations (p. 221). Neo-liberalism has boiled down the meaning of human freedom to a freedom of choice. For instance, it has reduced the human's freedom from operation and indignity to the freedom of choosing objects and knowledge from unfettered and self-adjusting markets (Dahlstrom, 2003b). Today, educational institutions have been exposed to market forces and made to reinforce neo-liberal agenda 'by catering to corporate power and money through such activities as making the primary focus of the curriculum related to jobs, not civic engagement...' (Malaney, 2006, p. 4). Educational reforms are made in response to the international neo-liberal stimuli and are regarded as an investment for individuals rather than a public good for social transformation; its costs and profits are evaluated according to market principles. As a result, 'the academic quality and collegiality have suffered as the neo-liberal model which emphasises managerial efficiency and quantitative measurements at the expense of qualitative aspects of education and faculty inputs gains ascendancy' (Zezeza, 2004, p. 53). Cost-sharing policy, the mushrooming of private learning institutions, the massification of education and the market models of financing public universities are some indicators of neo-liberal education in Africa are the direct impacts of neo-liberalism. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2005) has a precise phrase for neo-liberalism: *fundamentalism of finance capital and the elevation of the market to the status of a universal deity* (p. 155).

The market ethic maintained by neo-liberalism is in the sharp contrast of the pedagogy that maintains the integral ethics of human beings (Gadotti, 2003). Neo-liberalism is simply a pro-capitalist ideology that promotes transactional capitalism

and the private interests rather than the public one; it aims at penetrating the world markets and regulating the economy and trade liberalizations, thereby dismantling education and other public sectors. Giroux (2004b, p. 495) states that in the world dictated by neo-liberal agendas: 'Free market fundamentalism rather than democratic idealism is now the driving force of economics and politics in most of the world.' The key element in neo-liberalism is market, which is considered as the best solution to social and economic problems (Hursh, 2005; Salman, 2003). In the words of Giroux (2004a), market is 'the arbiter of social destiny.' Giroux continues to argue that in addition to limiting 'the vocabulary and imagery available recognize anti-democratic forms of power' neo-liberalism produces 'narrow models of individual agency' and weakens the critical functions of any viable democracy by undercutting the ability of individuals to engage in the continuous translation between public considerations and private interests by collapsing the public into the realm of the private' (p. 494). Because of this situation, the intrinsic values of knowledge have changed into a commodity subject for trading on the global market.

In short, 'the free autonomous subject is enframed through the censure knowledge and instrumentally rationale managerialist discourse' (Mansfield, 2005, p. 215). Education is considered as an economic investment rather than a public good. The values of citizens change in the world dictated by an unfettered market. Neo-liberals see citizens not as people with indisputable rights to education, but as mere 'consumers of educational products and services' and as consumers, their right is to 'choose among several options in the marketplace' (Schugurensky & Myers, 2003, p. 329).

Universities and other institutions compete to offer university degrees than education (Jarvis, 1995). The role of the institutions of learning is reduced to that of the passive implementers of policies and agendas set by experts who are physically and spiritually far removed from the practice. Thus, neo-liberalism is against the principle of education for social and personal transformation. The neo-liberal ideology discourages the language of solidarity and encourages hyper-individualism (the ethos of self-interest and self-preservation) (Giroux, 2001). Thus, instead of consolidating collaboration and interdependence, neo-liberalism promotes consumerism, individualism and competitiveness.

Teacher educators perpetuate neo-liberal agendas in divergent ways. For instance, they reinforce it when they practice teaching and training as 'transfer-of-knowledge pedagogy (Florence, 1998) and see a classroom as an arena of indoctrination or the site of instruction' rather than looking at 'as a cultural terrain that promotes learner empowerment and self-transformation' (McLaren, 1989, p. 167). As a suppressive ideology, neo-liberalism maintains the systematic subordination and self-abnegation of the oppressed and blocks education that enhances learners' capacity of understanding, evaluating, discriminating and transforming their social, political and economic realities. Today, neo-liberalism has become one of the main causes for the growth of educational and social inequality (Hill, 2002, 2003) and for the increasing 'gap between the quality of education for poor and minority youth and that of more privileged student' (McNeil, 2000, p. 3, cited in Hursh, 2001). Neo-liberals use the steps and principles of manufacturing industry to ensure quality education and to monitor the effectiveness of educators (Ellis, 1993).

It is within this devastating onslaught of neo-liberalism that this evaluative case study tries to examine the value conflicts in teacher education practices in Ethiopia. The paper presents two issues. One is my evaluation of and reflection on the day-to-day weaknesses of teacher education practice and how that is related to the overwhelming power of neo-liberal mechanisms of weakening the structural and functional qualities of teacher education at Haramaya University. The other is the presentation of teacher educators' reactions to the impact of plasma-channeled education in the Ethiopian secondary schools and its impacts on teacher preparation. Critical ethnography has been used as methodology to identify and understand the essence of the problem. The five-stage scheme or framework of the critical ethnographic research was adapted. These are '1) compiling the primary record through qualitative collection of data; 2) preliminary reconstructive analysis; 3) discovering dialogical data generation; 4) describing system relations; 5) using system relationships to explain the findings' (Robertson, 2005).

The paper is divided into three major divisions. In the first section of the paper, I present the tension between educational autonomy, consumerism and managerialism in the Ethiopian education. This is based on an evaluative study of the experience of teacher education at Haramaya University. The second part of the paper deals with the

presentation and analysis of a group of teacher educators' attitude towards the impact of plasma based education on the quality of teaching in the secondary school classrooms and on student teachers who go to these schools to gain field experience. The meanings and implications of these two aspects are then pointed out. The third part of the paper discusses what teachers and teacher educators have to do in order to protect their professional identity and practice from the enormous onslaught of neo-liberal agendas.

### **PART ONE: THE TENSION BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL AUTONOMY, CONSUMERISM AND MANAGERIALISM IN THE ETHIOPIAN EDUCATION: AN EVALUATIVE CASE STUDY AT HARAMAYA UNIVERSITY**

The main problem of higher learning institutions throughout the world today is that they are corporatizing their 'culture into one that more closely resembles that of midlevel corporate management transforming the focus from knowledge and content to outcomes and performance' (Malott, 2006). The way they do this may differ from nation to nation and from one situation to the other within a single nation. Let's see what the Haramaya University experience shows.

*Laying the structure of responsibility and authority to control teacher education practice:* It is enough to look at the structure that controls our day-to-day practice to feel the burden of neo-liberalism. Here at Haramaya University, we are unwittingly enacting neo-liberal agenda of privatization, decentralization, standardization of education. For example, we have recently produced modules instructed by the Ministry of Education, which thinks that modules ease learning and mastery of knowledge for learners. The Ministry's other argument is that in addition to ensuring standardized education, modules are cost-effective. The modulized education controls students mind and makes them see what is presented in the module as a legitimized and highly valued piece of knowledge and may discourage them from exploring for education that can liberate them. Instructors too are systematically discouraged from engaging their students in other learning activities and made to focus only on the content of the module when they prepare examinations.

*Making teacher educators undergo ill-organized and imposed training:* In our teacher education faculty, we undergo trainings whose aim is to control and standardize practice. For example, the Ministry of Education has recently introduced what it called Higher Diploma Program for Teacher Educators (HDPTE) into the university to certify teacher educators. According to the change agents who introduced the program, teacher educators must meet the professional standards of practice. The mission statement has it:

The Higher Diploma Program was developed in 2003 to *meet the identified* needs of teacher educators and support the implementation of TESO (Teacher Education Over Haul) program. The HDPTE started in all TEIs (Teacher Education Institutes) in Ethiopia from October 2003 ...as a new compulsory qualification for all teacher educators. *It provides teacher educators with a practical program* to support their development as effective teachers and reflective practitioners with enhanced professional status, able to model active learning and continuous assessment, manage change and make a difference in the education system (HDPTE, 2004, p. 5).

A cursory look at the mission statement reveals the tone that teacher educators are recipients of educational policies and managers and implementers of the policy. The distasteful part of the standardized formula for certifying teacher educators is that all teacher educators, irrespective of their experiences, interests and priorities are required to take exactly similar course. The HDPTE handbook contains toolkits teacher educators should use to assure quality of teaching. It tells teacher educators what they should do to shift from teacher-centred approach to learner-centred approach. It promotes the customer-oriented ethos of new managerialism that students are customers whose needs must be satisfied and underscores the notion that the primary role of teachers and teacher educators is satisfying the desire of their consumers.

The orientation has its roots in the consumerist view that looks at students as direct consumers and the wider society as indirect consumers of education. In this paradigm, consumers are always right and deserve dignified service. Therefore, as university teachers and teacher educators, we are supposed to 'determine the best way or ways for a student to learn the substance of a field of study' (Ellis, 1993, p. 19). Through systematically layered structure of responsibility and authority (Ellis, 1993), the university management strives to translate the needs of the customers. The university

that promotes consumer-centred education, strives for nothing, but to 'ensure that there is a follow-up to all its teaching to assess its acceptability and effectiveness to students, and that appropriate follow-up action is taken when teaching has not achieved its objectives' (Ellis, 1993, p. 35). Our university management applies this tradition, which is symptomatic of a neo-liberal educational management and leadership. One version of this in our university is image building. In regular meetings on educational issues the university management orients faculty and department heads and instructors to strike a balance between two contrast things: ensuring quality of education and putting maximum efforts to minimize student attrition rate.

The narrower version of quality is a teacher's and teacher educators' delivery of educational packages to students who receive it as clients. No one raises issues such as education for social freedom, social action and informed citizenship. The university management cheers when the attrition rate decreases and gets disappointed when the attrition increases because it is aware that the story of the increased attrition would disappoint the state change agents. This narrower version of achievement and on-achievement is the result of the commercialization of education in general and teacher education in particular. According to Porfilio & Yu (2006), the main characteristic feature of the commercialized teacher education is that

the hiring and firing of faculty members based on market needs, the recruiting of students for profits, the creating of quick programs to maximize economic gains, the judging of professors' teaching performance according to consumers demands, the standardization of curriculum, instruction, and assessment for economic efficiency, and the sacrificing of the critical mission of teacher education for practical and technical training.

The social notion of agency decline or disappear when consumerism guides people's actions and thoughts.

The problem is that the system through which the government wants to ensure the desire of the clients of education are not functioning as far as HDPTE is concerned. The way the course is run does not address the specific needs of the teacher educators in the faculty. For example, there is a situation where a person who has been teaching

and training in the faculty for over 25 years is required to take the same HDPTE course with a graduate assistant. All clients are treated as if they are similar in their needs and in the services they want. It is like giving different patients with different disorder the same medicine.

The program, based as it is on the belief that teacher educators have problems and need change, is biased from the very beginning and reduces teacher educators down to the passive recipients of change plans passed down to them from top. What is more, there is an assumption that getting certification makes them change their practice. In the context of the Faculty of Education at Haramaya University, the HDPTE leaders are inefficient and hold to a highly traditional teacher education philosophy. In addition, they are IFEISH volunteers from USA and thus have no practical knowledge of teacher education problems in Ethiopia. Although the introducers of HDPTE promote it as the professional development package for teacher educators, the program does not include knowledge and philosophies teacher educators need to meet the challenges of creating transformative teachers. Issues of central concern for teacher educators such as educating, evaluating, mentoring or supervising and engaging student teachers in reflective activities are largely excluded. Thus, it is not a relevant educative package as it places a premium on something that does not support teacher educators towards producing informed teachers.

These shortcomings all together reveal that the neo-liberal agenda of education is being reinforced in Ethiopia through HDPTE program. The whole experience shows that the neo-liberals' view of pedagogy as mere transferable package of knowledge for distribution to clients in bite-sized pieces (Lieberman, 1995) to achieve pre-set learning outcomes is being applied in our institution. As teacher educators, we are trained to implement a top-down teacher education policy.

*Controlling the professional learning of teacher educators and student teachers through standardized valuation format:* One of the agendas of neo-liberalism in teacher education is the provision of standardized training, assessment and grading system. This suppressive practice is evident in the way teachers are trained and evaluated at Haramaya University. The faculty does not have the mechanism to ensure the proper assessment of student teachers. The evaluation format is centrally prepared by the Pedagogy Section and distributed to supervisors of all departments. The format



contains the names of the competencies, explanations of the examples of actions that demonstrate proficiency in different competency areas and the five-point scale for rating the level of the student teachers' proficiency, but does not have points of evaluation that look for the student teachers' professional and collegial dispositions.

The format has been designed with the belief that '*one-size-fits-all*'. All of the departments are required to use the same format irrespective of the different perspectives of their student teachers or the training courses they offer. The format encourages supervisors to approach their student teachers with evaluative rather than educative mindsets. The worst side of it is that its preparation and application do not involve the student teachers and their supervisors. The pedagogical, curricular and procedural issues included in the checklist are not only too general, but also are decontextualised and based on outdated versions of the attributes of good teaching performance. It has its roots in the competency-based teacher education that tends to treat the competencies of teaching in generic terms. This is against the view that student teacher' evaluation and mentoring should attend to content-related matters in content-specific terms; it tends to see teachers' performance in the classroom as the most essential evidence of the acquisition of the teaching competence. By doing so, it reduces educational activities into technical accounts of discrete behaviors. The dynamics of instructional engagements and divergent ways teachers make instructional decision as they deal with their educational dilemmas are given no value in the format.

The other serious defect of the evaluation format is that it does not have the room for student teachers to learn how to cope with school climate and culture, to gain interpersonal and professional support from their supervisors and to reflect on their perspectives and denies both supervisors and their student teachers the opportunity to engage in critical reflection about the macro social and political factors that impact on the instructional practices. The format minimizes supervisors' role to the checking of teachers' instructional behaviors against pre-determined checklist points and obliges student teachers to conform to decontextualised techniques and procedures.

*Imposing the neo-liberal managerial system on the faculty-school partnership: As I pointed out throughout this paper, no aspect of teacher education in Ethiopia scrapes*

the influence of neo-liberal status quo. One can see the institutionalization of neo-liberal supremacy also in the way school-faculty relationships are arranged and student teachers are deployed. In our university, there is a Practicum Coordinating Office. The role of this office is to arrange conditions for the practicum. The office communicates about the faculty's plans to the schools and the officers of the districts governing the schools and visits schools and checks if the schools are ready to accommodate the student teachers.

One thing is important, however. That is whether there is really strong partnership between a teacher preparing faculty and the partner school. Strong relationship is more than showing a smiling face when the request is made. I raised this issue to the acting coordinator of the practicum office in the university. Without any hesitation, the coordinator confidently stated that there are strong relationships. When I further probed into the indicators of the existence of strong relationship, the coordinator mentioned a number of cases he thought are indicators of strong partnership. From the co-coordinator I learned that prior to sending student teachers out to the schools, the practicum office holds a meeting with school directors, officers of the local educational bureaus and political administration. This is called an awareness-building meeting. But what is emphasised on the meeting is how efficiently and effectively the university should implement the policy introduced from the top through deploying student teachers and teacher educators. As Gewirtz & Ball (2000) state, for this group of people, 'good management involves the smooth and efficient implementation of aims set outside school, within constraints also set outside school.' Such a group does not 'question or criticize these aims and constraints' (cited in O'Brien, 2002, p. 112).

In our case, from the university, the teacher education department heads, other higher officials in the university management, the practicum office and some student representatives participate in the awareness-building meeting. The student representatives are included as a fake practice of determining objectives and standards in consultation with the customer. The focus of the meeting is much on how to place students in schools, not on how to make an arrangement that ensures meaningful induction for them. On this meeting, the school representatives and the representatives of the local political bureaus are made aware about the role of the partner schools and their teachers in the practicum. The school directors and unit leaders are also told that

the schoolteachers should take the practicum as part and parcel of their own job. The whole focus is on how to deploy student teachers in a cost-effective fashion. This is a typical example of a 'neo-capitalist management strategies that focus exclusively on cost effectiveness and efficiency' and which 'leave limited opportunities for people to construct a coherent narrative of their lives and make it difficult for them to build a sense of self-respect and self-worth out of the working lives' (Totterdell, 2000, p. 131).

There are two critical problems that indicate the institutionalization of neo-liberal status quo in what the practicum coordinating office calls awareness-building meeting. The fact that the meeting involves only political or administrative bodies shows that the system is still centralized and its aim is to control practices. It suggests the neo-liberal beliefs and trust in structured control over practice. In our context, unfortunately, only a few numbers of those who take part in the meeting have better ideas of teacher education and the role of the practicum in the initial teacher preparation and perceive neo-liberalism as a politics of inequality. The rest talk about the deployment of student teachers in the nearby schools without first knowing why they have to be stationed. The points raised on the awareness-building meeting are concerned less with how to increase the professional learning opportunity for the student teachers and more with how to settle the mechanical issues like car arrangement and teacher allocation.

The practicum office does not arrange a forum for university supervisors and schoolteachers to discuss on and evaluate the problems encountered during the previous programs. In addition, it lacks the system for controlling over the proper running of the program. For example, according to the arrangement, the university supervisors and schoolteachers are expected to use similar evaluation format and to sit together and discuss their views, impressions and decisions about how well or bad a student teachers has performed. Sadly, this is not happening. Schoolteachers judge the student teachers in their own ways and finally submit the result of their evaluations to the practicum office in the university. The practicum office then gives the result of the schoolteachers' evaluations to the respective supervisors. But there is no way of checking whether or not the university supervisors have incorporated the schoolteachers' judgments during final letter grading. The practice is that if the

university supervisor knows that he/she did not have the opportunity to converse over the student teachers' performance with the schoolteacher, the former depends on his/her own discretion to decide the student teacher's letter grade without giving a second thought to the evaluation results of the schoolteacher.

## **PART TWO: SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ETHIOPIA AND THE SATELLITE TELEVISION EDUCATION (STE): A DIGITALIZED PERPETUATION OF CONTROL ON HUMAN MIND**

At this place, the paper makes departure to one serious problem affecting the quality and purpose of education in public schools in Ethiopia. This is teaching through digital video broadcasting (DVB), also called plasma display panels (PDPs). This is one agenda of neo-liberalism, which the Ethiopian government applauds as a transformative leap in the country's education development (FDRE, 2004). Amine Accram, a reporter of *Business in Africa* reported her excessive satisfaction about the system:

It [the Plasma TV] has already created nearly 3000 lessons, and Ethiopian are soaking it up as fast as they can make it. The new improved customized training solution has given Ethiopia the opportunity to access large numbers of learners at different locations at different times....So far the Memar TV project has rekindled hope in intellectual knowledge in a society that has had little to celebrate about through the use of its curriculum. The project also hopes to instill a culture of high-quality learning, with consistent messages enhancing the educational process, making it fun and interesting. By visualizing and listening to the content, students are exposed to an international experience.

The celebratory words of the reporter are similar to advertisements on TV commercials. By saying that *Ethiopian are soaking it up as fast as they can make it* [plasma-channelled-lesson] the journalist is treating the Ethiopian students as voracious consumers of lessons. In their attempt to defend the plasma education, the authorities of the Ministry of Education use similar promotional language. In one of its recent pamphlets, the Educational Media Program Agency (EMPDA) of the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2004) holds this neo-liberal view. It advances the position that the technology-aided education helps the government to offer quality and equitable education for all children in the schools.

The pamphlet has stated six benefits of satellite television (ST). The following is my translation of the list of advantages originally written in Amharic. According to the pamphlet (1) by merging movement with images, ST enables teachers to teach students effectively and to offer them a clear presentation of otherwise complex and obscure concepts: A picture is far better than one thousand words! (2) ST is the easiest and most effective way to give students and their teachers the fast access to the most up to date information; (3) ST enables (teachers) to deliver educational concepts in a simple and precise way;(4) ST ensures the delivery of similar educational programs simultaneously to thousands of students in different corners of the country;(5) ST offers (students and teachers) the opportunity to see and listen to model and effective teachers at the same time and (6) when it is spread throughout the country, ST becomes a cost-effective strategy.

The justification for disseminating similar type of education using similar modes of delivery is self-defeating. The justification shows that the government is running contrived educational program. This is because the program does not take into account the social, cultural and political differences of the students. There is also clandestine political target in disseminating similar content and mode of delivery. In his commentary on STE, Tessema (2006) contends that the national televised education program is an attempt to unify knowledge and curriculum, and by doing so, to control the hearts and minds of students and to render teachers powerless. The top-down centralization and standardization of contents and procedures of educational delivery implies that the role of the implementers is relegated to the secondary position. A centralized control over what teachers do and what students learn is really a ‘curricular homogenization.’ It is an attempt to reduce curricula into easily testable bits. That is done to legitimize unquestionable truths and technical knowledge as the optimal form of human knowledge and inquiry (Fuller, 1991).

The Ministry of Education’s (MOE, 2005) other document under the title: *Guidelines on the Usage of Satellite Educational Programs Television* equally accentuates the importance of information communication technology (ICT) to bring behavioral changes and to ensure sustainable development in the country. This document holds the belief that ICT aided educational provisions open a wide opportunity for students to compete for international accomplishments and emphasises that the use of ICT in

schools enhances students' self-directed learning opportunity and their confidence as citizens. The other belief is that education through ICT enables students to get access to the international spectra of hobbies and fields of interest. Again, the government sees ICT as a panacea to the entire social, political, educational, cultural and economic conundrums the country has long been submerged in.

In the pamphlets that promote ICT, knowledge is understated as a commodity than as something that aims at developing the citizenry's critical and independent thinking. Education as a practice of freedom through the process of which learners discover themselves and their socio-political situations is neglected when its delivery is shaped on the market ethic sustained by neo-liberalism (Gadotti, 2003).

The pamphlets impose neo-liberal agendas on school pupils by stating that technology-packaged education ensures quality learning. To check the extent to which teacher educators agree or disagree to this essentialist view, I involved 17 teacher educators in the Faculty of Education at Haramaya University to reflect on the overall impact of the newly introduced satellite television education (STE) on teaching, learning and the teacher preparation programs of teacher education institutions. I distributed a qualitative questionnaire which contained five questions that embodied the following interrelated themes of reflections: (1) their views of the advantages and disadvantages of STE; (2) their view of the relationship between STE and the active learning rhetoric accentuated in teacher education policy of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, (3) whether STE puts the active learning (learner centeredness) backward or forward; and (4) their view of the impact of STE on teacher preparation programs.

Some teacher educators have replicated the same neo-liberal discourse articulated in the ministry's pamphlets. Some of the replications are (1) STE can provide students the opportunity to learn science subjects in a better way than when the same information is offered by their teachers, (2) that in rural secondary schools that do not have enough or no laboratory, teaching aids and reference materials to demonstrate and substantiate classroom lessons, (3) the satellite imaging is a good alternative, (4) that STE solves the problem of coupling lecture with demonstrations, (5) that STE enables the government to offer standardized and uniform education for all of the secondary school students throughout the country, (6) that STE is an input for

classroom teachers as they may have the chance to sharpen their knowledge of the subject matter and their demonstration and communication skills on those of the televised teachers and (7) that the plasma teaching being a recorded one can remain forever and can be improved to the best by comparing the suggestions collected. This group of respondents' perception reveals that in a neo-liberal culture... the individual is usually unknowingly implicated in creating subjectivity that fits within the prevailing political rationality (Fitzsimons, 2002).

Others (the majority of them) stated that STE is an imposition both on classroom teachers and their students. Their overall reaction is that it is a glaring mistake to substitute the classroom teacher totally by the STE teacher. According to the respondents, (1) STE dehumanizes teaching learning process, (2) STE puts unnecessary demands on students as it makes them struggle to learn under obvious time constraint, (3) STE is no way of ensuring students' learning achievements while teaching, as the transmission is unidirectional, (4) STE underrates the importance of teachers in the classroom as the teacher simply stands and stares in the class during plasma instruction, (5) STE is an imposition of the old teacher-centred approaches on students as there is no any opportunity for the students to ask and get clarification from the plasma teacher, (6) STE promoters consider schools, teachers and students throughout Ethiopia as similar, and believe in the rigidly standardized provision of educational services. These views resonate in the following reflection:

In its present form plasma based education has got several weaknesses. Its major problem is that it confiscated teachers' ownership of their classes. Teachers are no more important than facilitating the plasma lessons following the instructions offered them by the plasma teacher. They are made less significant and knowledgeable than the plasma teachers. This implies that their training is inadequate and or unnecessary. This situation is just like disemboweling both professionally and socially. Professionally, their role is made insignificant, as they do not have any control over the plasma transmission. Socially, teachers lose their traditional respect in front of their students as the situation gives the students the impression that their teachers' roles were confiscated because they are unable to discharge their responsibilities.

In addition, the teacher educators indicated that the government had made no heed about the educational, infrastructural and social contexts of schooling.

The following citation shows this view clearly:

It [STE] does not take into account contextual differences in which students learn. For instance, it assumes that there are no difference between students at Kersa (a small rural town) and Addis Ababa. But for various reasons, students at Addis Ababa can more readily cope up with the speed and the language of the plasma teachers whereas students at peripheral areas may not be able to do the same. There are still individual differences, which the Plasma TV does not take into account. The STE has removed the classroom teacher from the traditional position that enables him/her to provide individualized support and attention.

As one of the respondents pointed out, in a rural town where there is regular electricity failure, the centrally transmitted education is subject to interruption and there is no way of compensating for it. The other is the view that STE shows Ethiopia's educational dependence on other country. In the awareness building documents that propagate the values of ICT in secondary schools, the government argued that both teachers and their students have the opportunity to listen to model and expert plasma teachers. These plasma teachers whose archetypality and expertise the government applauds are non-Ethiopian televised teachers. The teacher educators observed that there is confusion about the role of classroom teachers and it is unclear whether teachers enter the classroom to teach and support their students or to listen to and stare at the transmission. The repercussion of this role confusion, as some of the respondents argued, is that students may start to develop the belief that the role of the Ethiopian teacher is to open and close the TV. In two of the senior secondary schools at Kersa and Dire Dawa towns I observed that even the operation of the TV (the opening and the closing) is done by the classroom monitors and the teachers' main role is checking that the class monitors do that properly.

The teacher educators have observed that there is a great mismatch between the rhetoric of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (the intended active learning/student-centred approach) and the actual experience of teaching and learning in poor Ethiopian schools where teaching is done through plasma television. The teacher educators indicated that the actual teaching learning processes in schools show that in the plasma-based education where students are heavily dependent on the information they receive from the plasma teacher, one cannot think of learner-centered education. They said that although he/she calls students in the TV screen and seems to look at the learners and what they are doing, the plasma teacher has no mechanism of anchoring



the pedagogy to learners' problems and of making learners become accountable for their own learning.

The teacher educators indicated that the plasma-based education puts the active learning (student-centeredness) accentuated in the EETP backward. According to one teacher educator, the actual experience in the schools shows the view of teaching and learning as relatively simple interactions in which the teacher (the knowledgeable) gives out and the students (the passive recipients) take away whatever is offered them. Other teacher educator argues that the plasma education dominated not only the students and their learning opportunities, but also the professional practice of the classroom teachers. According to one of the participants:

Previously, students were dominated by their teachers. Currently, however, the plasma teacher who the Ministry of Education considers perfect and expert dominates both students and their teachers. Thus in its present form, learner-centeredness is not working in Ethiopian high schools. A classroom teacher needs to be motivated and empowered to carry out his/her task of teaching. Unfortunately this task is taken away by the system. A teacher is more responsible for what happens in his/her classroom than a speaker or an actor or actress in the plasma screen.

According to another teacher trainer unlike what the government change agents think, in the plasma classroom 'students for the largest proportion of the period are passive listeners. The plasma dominates the involvement of students in the learning process. Again, ranges of activities are not included in the lessons.'

One can draw a conclusion on the basis of what the teacher educators say that instructional activities are not being carried out properly and thus school pupils are benefiting less from the technology. There is also a suggestion that STE has disrupted teachers' self-directed professional practice. On the part of the advocates of STE in the Ministry of Education, there is a view that STE eases the task of teaching and class management for teachers. In contrast, in the teacher educators' reflections revealed that STE has expropriated or confiscated teachers' ownership of their classes. One of the teacher educators briefly put it: 'It (the plasma TV) makes teachers mere TV operators. It also minimizes their role of being innovative of different approaches of teaching. Moreover, it greatly reduces teachers' reflectivity.' Another one said that only ten minutes (25%) of the allotted time is used by the teacher and

added that not only students, but also teachers are inactive/impotent in this regard. For another one: ‘In most of the classrooms that I observed teachers seem to have little role and appear disinterested. I personally talked to some of the teachers and they told me that they are at loss. They think that their job is simply turning on and switching off the program.’

Other respondents argued that in the plasma classroom, the role of the teacher is to implement the command of the plasma teacher while that of the plasma teacher is to demonstrate his/her knowledge of the subject matter and to explain the instructional goals. After explaining the lesson, its objectives and the learning procedures, the plasma teacher commands the classroom teacher to check whether or not the students are doing what is expected of them. Concerning the impact of plasma on teacher training and induction, the teacher educators stated that the view that (1) the range of skills and knowledge required to teach which the student teachers discuss in teacher education classrooms are not being applied since teachers are dispossessed of their professional practice; (2) the plasma program never helps the teachers to act in the way they are trained; (3) what we train our student teachers is on how to promote active learning as stated in the policy, but the real school situation is plasma-based; and (4) obviously, if the present schooling situation continues, no need for teacher preparation programs.

The inherent theme in these points is that in practice, the teacher education institutions have no relevant job as what they are doing (i.e. the general teaching and learning methods, methodologies and strategies with which they equip student teachers) are not being applied in schools. There was also a view that if the plasma-based education continues in the secondary schools, student teachers may easily observe that what they are taught in their teacher education departments are inapplicable in the secondary school classrooms, and thus may hate the courses they are offered in the university.

As I mentioned above, the university supervisors go to partner schools with a rigidly preconceived checklist to see how the student teachers manage the class. The rubrics for the evaluation were generated largely from educational theories or research findings about qualities of teaching. Most of them are what the student teachers might have learned in their general and subject area methodology courses. The fact that

there is no point in the evaluation checklist that talks about an effective use of ICT in general and satellite television in particular shows that what teacher education institutions are doing as part of their teacher preparation duty and the practical world of teaching in schools are in direct mismatch. The reality of teaching as it is being carried out in schools is in direct mismatch also with the assessment criteria set in the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (EETP).

## **ANALYSIS OF THE CUMULATIVE THEMES**

The whole experience, which I have gained as a result of my own day to day observations of the problem of teaching and teacher education at Haramaya University and what the teacher educators stated suggest that we are not practicing education as a practice of freedom. The discussion reveals the existence in the teacher education faculty of institutionalized limitations on the agency and autonomy of teachers and teacher educators to use their pedagogical spaces for emancipatory purposes (Hill, 2003, 2004). The experience shows also that within neo-liberal dominance, the role of teacher education is to train and supply student teachers with toolkits, which the latter use to manage their classrooms. Our teacher educators do not have plans and projects that make the student teachers think about what should be done to ensure the enhance the contribution education makes toward changing the life of the society. The study suggests that the faculty has been preparing 'teachers to work in schools as they are rather than as they ought or might be, and in so doing they are perpetuating and validating the reactionary status quo' (Porfilio & Yu, 2006). The way teachers are placed in schools, what they teach there and the strategies used to evaluate them cannot produce 'rigorously educated teachers with an awareness of the complexities of educational practice and an understanding of and commitment to a socially just, democratic notion of schooling' (Kincheloe, 2004, cited in Porfilio & Yu, 2006). It implicates an *'increased objectification of education, the curriculum, teachers, students and the increased use of formalized control system and managerialist practice'* (Beach & Carlson, 2004, p. 686). The following are the major findings: (1) Monitoring achievement through a standard quality assurance scheme and viewing achievement as measurable, unequivocal, reliable and right; (2) Using narrow assessment procedures/framework, which reduces human knowledge and values to observable discrete behaviors; (3) Boiling competence to a mere set of

performances; (4) Seeing learners as knowledge seeking rather than understanding seeking; (5) imposing standards and procedures to judge the performance of teachers and teacher educators and viewing that teachers/teacher educators know nothing and should be told; (6) Seeing teaching as a process of pouring knowledge into the minds of learners and learning as a process of receiving that knowledge as a perfect, unquestionable truth (7) imposing/institutionalizing neo-liberal policy (technology) of managerialism and performativity (Thrupp, 2006, p. 3), and (8) discouraging teachers and their students (student teachers) from becoming critical intellectuals by turning them into human databanks' (Giroux, 2004b, p. 502).

All of these problems show together that our education takes the 'form of indoctrination, of enforcing submission to dominant values, and of social reproduction in which one is tutored into submission and acceptance of an oppressed and subordinate status' (Kellner, 2003, p. 56). As teacher educators, we are trained to implement a top-down teacher education policy. As we try to manage the policy it is clear that we whirl in what Tony Booth termed as 'the shadow of managerialist absurdity' (Cited in Fielding, 2005, 62) and lose the preferential right of interpretation over our own practices (Dahlström, 2003a). In my recent work (Hussein, 2006, p. 12), I strongly pointed out that we have to make change in the way we treat teacher education and our student teachers:

If the main reason why we offer education people liberate themselves we have to shift teacher education from a place where student teachers collect a grab-bag of techniques and tricks to a place where they start to think critically about issues surrounding the social and individual purposes of schooling. Any democratic teacher education program transgresses beyond the process of essentializing purportedly justified moral views that in fact merely serve individual or factional interests and strives to inculcate open-mindedness and free expression

### **PART THREE: THE LANGUAGE OF POSSIBILITY: A REQUISITE FOR EMANCIPATING THE ETHIOPIAN EDUCATION FROM THE NEO-LIBERAL REGIME**

In the foregoing discussion, I have attempted to show that teacher education has become detheorized, technicized and de-intellectualized (Hill,

2005) practice. The question one has to pose is: How do we expect teachers and teacher educators to bring change while they work and live with old ideas and practices? As I see, teachers/teacher educators may not change and 'unless a new theoretical paradigm complete with a new language of political activism filters into the educational process' (Robertson, 2005) in general and teacher education in particular. Only this can enable them to develop a better understanding of the essence of international hegemonic neo-liberalism and its threat to democratic education/educational equity. Understanding neo-liberalism's essential meaning is a necessary condition for teachers and teacher educators to free their institutions from the influence of the neo-liberal supremacy and to educate their student teachers to think critically.

Neo-liberalism is triumphed over only when we create a teaching force that is not only skilled, competent, technicians, but also is critical and reflective, transformative and intellectual (Hill, 2003). Teacher educators should take a conscious interrogation into how neo-liberalism invades, kills and conquers. This means they have to practice critical pedagogy. By adapting this line, teacher educators can extend their visions of practice beyond the classroom.

One part of the critical pedagogical struggle is understanding the limiting and suppressing power of neo-liberal agendas on education in general and teacher education in particular. We need to understand the ideological root of neo-liberalism and its capitalist agenda of marketization and commercialization of education and other public sectors. Porfilio & Yu (2006) give us a list of recommendations, which they think are important to resist and subvert commercialization. According to them (1) teacher educators must guide their thinking and actions with a respect for and commitment to human worth, democracy, and moral mission, (2), must reclaim their role as faculty members in higher education, (3) need to have a moral obligation to educate for critical citizenry and take the responsibility to engage students in critical reflection, dialogues, and debates about the role of individuals in transforming society, (5) must advocate and dedicate ourselves to a moral mission to create and maintain a just and loving community, (6) must policies and regulations and every other move designed to propagate this consumerist, corporate model of education and check that the program design and curriculum development are organized around the

purpose of students' intellectual development, not commercial gains, (7) must help pre-service and in-service teachers make sense of the complex forces driving the spread of neo-liberal policies and practices, the globalization of capital, and commercial forms of pedagogies and knowledge within schools and the wider society.'

For me what Porfilio & Yu (2006) suggest sounds well at rhetoric. As they stress, it is important to become optimistic about change. However, the question is: who are these teacher educators whom we advise to see beyond the immediate and educate their student teachers to know and stand against the devastating effects of neo-liberalism? For example, when they say that

our chief mission [as teacher educators] is to help pre-service and in-service teachers make sense of the complex forces driving the spread of neo-liberal policies and practices, the globalization of capital, and commercial forms of pedagogies and knowledge within schools and the wider society

Porfilio & Yu (2006) seem to assume that teacher educators are pretty well aware of the neo-liberal agenda and its devastating effect on teacher education.

In our context, there are teacher educators who have insufficient grasp of how the local structure of operation and surveillance works let alone sensing the entrenched neo-liberal ethos. While taking the position that the only option we have as teacher educators is to struggle against the neo-liberal agenda, we must not deny that the job of engaging teacher educators in productive and in critical perspectives is not a simple job. The subtlety of neo-liberalism and the complex ways through which it controls human minds and actions in general is beyond the readiness of most of us to challenge. In Ethiopia the issue is gravely serious. The question I raise then is: *Are we ready to confront the neo-liberal agenda and its exertions on us? Is there really a reasonable understanding of the problems in the global educational agenda for developing countries?* The teaching and thinking force our teacher education requires is one that has a good understanding of the devastating effects of neo-liberalism that transfers the economics rationale into the educational agenda.

Neo-liberalism, which is suppressing the social, political, educational and the cultural rights of the humans, has become a tough challenge to critical theories, including

critical pedagogy. Thus, educators have to regularly re-orient themselves and adapt critical pedagogy and other liberatory educational discourses to the new challenges of neo-liberalism. For example, they have to continually examine how in institutions of higher learning neo-liberalism reinforces itself through school managers' 'enhanced power of surveillance and control to ensue teachers' compliance and increased productivity' (Merson, 2001, cited in O'Brien, 2002, 113) and how due to lack of awareness, they unwittingly participate in the valorization of the popular myths and traditions of authenticity and perfection that socialize us into neo-liberalism.

The Ethiopian teacher educators must acquaint themselves with the language of possibility and sift the good from the bad and the working from the non-working. Without language of possibility and critique teacher educators cannot confront neo-liberal agenda. As Leonardo (2004) put, 'quality education begins with a language of critique, *at the heart of which is a process that exposes the contradictions of social life*' (p. 12) with a '*critical capacity to imagine an alternative reality for education*' (p. 15, emphasis added). Critical pedagogy leads to a transformed self-understanding through a deliberate and critical examination on the social and political conditions that limit one's opportunity. It understands teachers as transformative intellectuals who participate not only in their own process of change, but also in the task of solving the socio-political problems of their society and seeking deeper understanding of the impact of the macro social and political issues on the teaching learning processes in their schools. It informs us that as practitioners our concern should be the complex system within which people are socialized for their existence in the society and the role of gender, class, ethnicity/race and other social and institutional groupings to mediate power relationships in the society.

The following critical pedagogy questions have been adapted from Giroux (1997) who posed them in relation to the production, distribution and evaluation of classroom knowledge: (1) What counts as knowledge and experience of student teachers? (2) How is that knowledge and experience produced? (3) Where does the espoused knowledge come from? (4) Who is going to legitimize the different ways of knowing? (5) Whose purpose does it primarily serve? (6) To what extent do the student teachers have access to the source of this knowledge and experience and its prime purpose? (7) How is the knowledge and experience distributed? (8) What evaluation system is used

to assess the acquisition of the knowledge and experience or to legitimize it? (9) Is there any room for the student teachers and their evaluators (e.g. university supervisors and school cooperating/associate teachers) to discuss over the contradictions inherent in what was set as teacher knowledge and experience and ways of legitimizing it? (10) Is there any room for student teacher to question and examine the values embedded in the teaching strategies, pedagogical views and the syllabi they are made to follow?

These questions may enable one to examine the appropriateness or inappropriateness of our duty and may help us gain the opportunity to investigate the contradictions between the rhetoric and the practice. This means that a teacher is not only a master of teaching and learning procedure, but also of the content to be taught and the rationale for teaching and learning. He/she is a human being with the capacity to explain why something is done to himself and others and to construct knowledge and experience for himself/herself through critical reflection, exploration, investigation, judgment, deliberation and decisions. Using critical pedagogy as our principle, we can convince our student teachers to see that their 'day to day social interactions in the classroom are deeply ideological processes that shape consciousness and common sense ideas about the way the world works and one's place in it' and are the integral parts of 'the social reality that defines and limits human agency, part of the ideological apparatus that domesticates thought and mystifies power relations, negating the possibility of creating an alternative to the existing social structures' (Lipman, 2004).

Our teacher educators need to make a critical evaluation of the structure and practices that 'normalize surveillance, regulation and punishment; promote rigid binaries of good/bad students, teachers, and schools; erode social solidarities; and undermine critical thought and agency' (Lipman, 2004). This clearly means that we are participating in the struggle 'to defend the public sphere from its integration into the neo-liberal and imperialist practice...and the behemoth of globalized capitalism' (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2003, p. 71). As teacher educators before we are able to develop our student teachers' self-awareness, we must liberate ourselves 'from libidinal, institutional or environmental forces which limit our options and rational



control over lives but have been taken for granted as beyond human control' (Mezirow, 1981, cited in Jarvis, 1995, p. 96).

Mezirow calls this form of transformation *perspective transformation*. Freire's (1970) spectacular concept of *conscientization* has similar liberatory purpose. Freire (1971) defines *conscientization* as 'a critical approach to reality in order to discover it and discover the myths that deceive us and help to maintain the oppressing dehumanizing structure' (cited in Jarvis, 1995, p. 84). In other words, it is a critical consciousness toward the social and political structure of oppression that make us 'find pleasure in ways of being and thinking, ways of looking at the world that reinforce and maintain our positions as dominated' (hooks, 1990, cited in Florence, 1998, p. 37). Both *perspective transformation* and *conscientization* are the outcomes of 'critical interrogation of one's location, the identifications, and allegiances that inform one's life' (Florence, 1998, p. 36). According to Florence (1998, p. 36), becoming critical towards factors (internal as well as external) that limit our existence places one in a better position 'to distinguish myth from reality, one's capacity to 'transgress' falsely constructed or perceived limitations' and to develop 'a renewed understanding of self and an appreciation of one's agency and self-determination as one struggles toward self-actualization.' This is important for teachers and teacher educators, who take refuge in routines, accept managerial activities uncritically and laze away from reflecting on beliefs and assumptions that underlie their practice.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper has endeavored to locate the value conflicts in public and teacher education in Ethiopia within the global neo-liberalism. It has argued that the practice of pedagogy as a process of transferring and learning as a process of consuming knowledge are what neo-liberals reinforce. For example, on the basis of the information collected from a group of teacher educators, the paper pointed out how STE-based education is harming the education of children in secondary schools and the professional practice of student teachers who go to these schools for professional practice. The paper analyzed the fundamental meanings inherent in the collected data and my own interpretation of it. The paper generally found out that our education is under a battering influence of neo-liberalism of variegated local manifestations and

stressed that one cannot fight neo-liberalism in vacuum: one must adopt 'critical theory as a lens through which to view the world, interject professional values into their work, embrace social activism, and become change agents' (Malaney, 2006, p. 2).

The paper underscored that to confront the neo-liberal agendas that have been weakening the objectives of education, teacher educators need the language of critique and possibility. The language of possibility would enable them to confront neo-liberal agenda and liberate themselves before they liberate their student teachers. Their own training as teachers and teacher educators, in addition to focusing on the mastery of *what* they should teach and *how* they teach, must engage them in the process of reflection on the impacts of global agenda on the local programs. Without having a well-informed academics about and critical of 'the discourses that demonize young people, their parents and their teachers, and the discursive and material practices that serve market interests and work against the democratization of public education' (Eyre, 2002, p. 75), how can we fight against neo-liberalism? The language of critique and possibility is necessary 'for fostering and fomenting of revolutionary praxis' (McLaren, 2003, p. 83). In the words of Giroux (2004b, p. 501), this is 'critical pedagogy that is self-conscious about its politics and engages students in ways that offer them the possibility for becoming critical.' In Ethiopia, to overcome the problem or at least to minimize its impacts, a new teacher education overhaul is required: *this is a teacher education practice that encourages teachers and teacher educators to radicalize the potentially detrimental effects of neo-liberal ideology. When and how this happens in this country is what the future answers.*

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