Critical perspectives on teacher education in neo-liberal times: Experiences from Ethiopia and Namibia

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Abstract

This article combines analysis from teacher education in Ethiopia and Namibia with recent examples of neo-liberal influences on national education sectors. The article describes the national teacher education reforms and analyses the forces of and damage caused by the 'liberal virus' by looking at the plasma teacher phenomenon in Ethiopia and critical practitioner inquiry in Namibia. Our findings show how neo-liberalism when entering the education arena reduces teachers to technical caretakers and transforms what was once introduced as progressive and critical practices of education into separated entities following technical rationalities. Teacher education is also silently transformed to develop students and teachers alike into consumers in the educational marketplace through the neo-liberal governmentality that turns people into tightly controlled individuals who insist on claiming to be free in a globalized world. This article not only illustrates the damage inflicted by the liberal virus, but recommends the practice of contextualized critical thinking at all levels of education as proposed in critical practitioner inquiry practices.

Public education systems worldwide have since the early 1990s more than ever been threatened by neo-liberalism. In essence, neo-liberalism looks at public activities, such as education and social welfare, first and foremost as costly commodities that should be put to a test in an 'open' market just like any other commodity. As such, neo-liberalism also threatens the humanistic democratic rights and value systems behind publicly financed systems. As critical scholars in these difficult days of neo-liberalism, we have the responsibility to question the neo-liberal hegemony. Our present inquiry into teacher education and related issues in Ethiopia and Namibia has been undertaken as part of this responsibility and our outlook departs from a global

perspective encompassing the metaphor of an 'infection' or 'virus.

The liberal virus

> Towards the end of the twentieth century a sickness struck the world. Not everyone died, but all suffered from it. The virus which caused the epidemic was called the liberal virus'. (Amin, 2004: 6)

The liberal virus continues to influence our experiences in the 21st century to the extent that we today can consider it a pandemic and part of common sense, as defined by Gramsci (1971). Neo-liberalism, the cause of the liberal virus, turns human activities and endeavours into commodities following the discourses of free trade and freedom of choice. With this commoditization process being coupled with positive concepts like 'free' and 'freedom', it easily becomes accepted as a token for liberal democracy and taken for granted by many as a normal and positive ingredient of all aspects of life, including education.

However, behind the scenes in the Western core countries the welfare state and public education are about to be dismantled. Public education was introduced around half a century ago as a humanitarian project of solidarity and part of the historical compromise between labour and capital after World War II. Public education systems are undermined through the introduction of measures like voucher systems, in which the public costs of educating a child follow the child even where the child's parents prefer private schooling. The consequence is that public funds are turned into the private profits of educational enterprises. Emphasis on competition, testing and efficiency demands further undermine public education following the leading trends in the US, which Zeichner (2006) has characterized as a reintroduction of apartheid education. A similar erosion of the public education system is taking place in other core capitalist countries like Sweden, through a combination of a voucher system and so-called independent schools, i.e. private schools. It is estimated on the basis of data from the Swedish National Agency for Education (2007) that from 2008 around 50% of all secondary schools in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, will be run by private enterprises. The effects of neo-liberal policies on education in Australia and New Zealand were thoroughly analysed in a recent issue of the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (Volume 20, No. 3). In it Davies & Bansel (2007: 249) confirm the trends in Western core countries of the 'largely invisible installation of neo-liberal technologies and practices' of surveillance and end-product-driven teaching. Such installations are supposed to turn individuals into free competitors in an 'open' market. Education is expected to work as one of the invisible forces to create the new market-adjusted individuals through these measures.

Meanwhile, development in peripheral countries in the South continues to be marketed as a repetition of the Western development paradigm. This is done not least by measures installed by their own governments, with the effect that development is

understood as becoming part of the global system of trade, production and profit. Less is said about the unspoken systemic humanitarian side-effects that are reduced to individual dysfunctions when the neo-liberal promises are not fulfilled. Even though education in the mainstream is today part of the neo-liberal disease, it can also be turned into the cure, in both core and peripheral countries, provided we challenge the present mainstream practices in all their forms and develop educative alternatives.

Global trends on national grounds

The above references to educational developments in the US, Sweden, Australia and New Zealand show that the general trends of neo-liberal expansions are played out differently in the social and cultural fields of different national arenas owing to the dynamic interplay between power structures and cultural traditions (Steensen 2006). This also happens in countries like Ethiopia and Namibia, when claims for commoditization and privatization, management and efficiency, as well as learner or student-centred education enter the field of education as integral parts of the neo-liberal agenda in peripheral countries. The following analysis starts with teacher education reforms and moves into recent areas of neo-liberal influences that have already begun to endanger the humanitarian aspects of national teacher education policies and programmes.

The Ethiopian experiences

The present system of teacher education in Ethiopia goes back to the objectives and strategies of the 1994 Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia. Some years later a task force was created to develop the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO), a policy programme that was initiated in 2003. One of the tasks of TESO was to do away with the perceived unprofessionalism of teachers, who demanded salary increases, let the quality of education fall and were considered to be elitists denying room for the motto of 'education for all'. The TESO policy represented a paradigm shift -according to its own writings (MOE 2003) - that officially followed the international trends of active learner-focused education operationally installed through a neo-liberal filter. The implementation of such a strategy included changes in both the structure and content of school curricula, through reductions of programmes from four to three years at the universities and by moving away from subject to vocational emphasis, including a practicum for teacher education. New areas like action research, civics and ethics, English communication skills and ICT were also included, all being reduced to packages to be applied for specific professions.

Furthermore, teacher education institutions, which are meant to be centres of knowledge production through critical thinking and to establish 'quality education', have since 2003 started to become institutions controlled by centrally planned and standardized curricula produced at the Education Ministry for all schools and universities

in the country. This is happening despite the differences in experience and resources at institutional level. However, observations and findings from interviews with teacher educators who are expected to implement the new policies show gaps between the rhetoric of policy documents and what the state-owned media preach on the one hand and what is practised on the ground on the other (Engida 2006; Kassahun 2006).

Critical scholars who are familiar with the situation in Ethiopia worry about educational development in the country. Negash (2006: 48) claims 'the Ethiopian experience is that of mistaking modernization for Westernization, that is, a process whereby the borrowing of Western technology and rationality meant the progressive dissolution of the Ethiopian mentality'. Hussein (2006: 13) examines the value conflicts in teacher education practices in Ethiopia and concludes 'the practice of pedagogy as a process of transferring andsfearning as a process of consuming knowledge are what neo-liberals reinforce' and 'our education is under a battering influence of neo-liberalism of variegated local manifestations'. One of these manifestations is discussed in greater detail below together with the far-reaching consequences it might have for teacher education in the country.

The plasma teacher phenomenon

This phenomenon is officially called 'educational satellite television programmes' but is commonly known as 'plasma' or 'surrogate' teachers (Lemma 2006a). All students in grades 9 to 12 watch lessons in natural sciences, mathematics, English and civics that are presented on plasma television sets. In principle, the role of the ordinary teacher in the classroom is to unlock the cage where the screen is placed and to slide the screen in front of the class and eventually to introduce 'the topic' by writing it on the board. The teacher has five minutes for this task before the transmission starts, following a nationally directed time schedule. During the entire lesson the teacher is then reduced to a spectator just like the students, until the plasma television programme ends. This is followed by an eight to ten-minute summary by the teacher on the lesson just transmitted. After that, students rush to next lesson, where they meet another subject and another teacher but the same 'media oracle', and the whole cycle resumes. Throughout these 'plasma lessons', 80 to 90 students remain seated in a room designed for 35 students. This summarized description of the situation is based on classroom observations and discussions with teachers on two occasions separated by six months and is further analysed below (Lemma 2006b; Dahlstrom 2006).

The general impression is one of passivity and uni-directional lectures, contrary to the officially proclaimed student-centred policy. Actually, as stated in the policy documents referred to above, teachers have been evaluated as 'useless' and are therefore replaced so that the 'teaching media' can speak directly to the students without interruption from an intermediate 'obstacle'. Teachers have nothing to do during the lectures of the plasma teacher and students try to follow the speedy lesson tempo at the

beginning of each lesson. Eventually, many students lose interest and turn into passive spectators of the plasma teachers as the TV lectures progress. Occasionally, students are asked to carry out tasks that are framed by a ticking clock on the screen indicating the 20 or 40 seconds allocated per task. Most students do not cope with this situation and are not able to finish the tasks on time. After all, it does not matter if students attempt to carry out the tasks or not; the answers will appear on the screen at the end of the allotted time. To this we can add the following observations: The plasma teachers are not Ethiopians but foreigners, and the lessons are carried out in perfect English, but with a foreign accent alien to students in Ethiopian secondary classrooms. Many lessons are culturally framed within alien contexts. For example, an observed civics lesson referred to what happens among the audience in the darkness of a cinema in South Africa. The whole classroom situation is such that the classroom teachers are dehumanized and deskilled.

The introduction of plasma teachers has been very successful, if the intention was to bypass what has been evaluated as inefficient classroom teachers. Teachers claim that their job has become much easier, as they do no longer need to prepare lesson plans and do not have to execute the lessons in class. Instead, the ready-made plasma lessons that are uniform for all students in all parts of the country enter the classroom despite the contextual differences of students. Furthermore, the policy of continuous assessment has been turned into one multiple-choice final examination per subject given at the end of each semester, since the whole semester is taken up by plasma teacher lectures.

Our observations pose many contextual questions related to the future role of teacher education, the status of the teaching profession and the vulnerability of high-tech solutions as the remedy to educational problems in remote African situations. We also leave it to readers of this article to put themselves in the shoes of the Ethiopian students who must watch TV sets for hours, five days a week, and over four years of high school education. During these years of high school education students are up against an inanimate object, the plasma TV, that does not have any feelings or that never interacts with them. They have neither the time nor place to form study groups to help each other, nor to approach their teachers for discussions on concepts they are unable to grasp, as no time is made available for these purposes.

What is the future of teacher education when plasma teachers perform the lessons? On one occasion we found a school totally deserted by teachers and the administration (Lemma 2006a). We were told that they had gone for a meeting and the caretakers or guards of the school, as they are called in Ethiopia, had been instructed to open the classrooms for the students, who then arranged their own lessons with the plasma teacher. It has also been observed that eventually, out of frustration over the lack of opportunity to exercise their responsibilities, teachers start to arrive at school late or even to be absent for petty reasons. This makes very little difference to the students, since the surrogate plasma teachers replace the classroom teachers. Teachers are

systematically pushed out of their profession, where they are paid meagre salaries for 'doing nothing', let alone instilling critical thinking in the growing minds of students. What kind of teacher education is needed in such situations? Can caretakers or technical TV operators replace qualified teachers in the classroom? Parents are worried about the teachers' responsibilities in school as they do not know who is accountable for the education of their children. Purely out of concern and professional commitment, many teachers developed their own schemes for tutoring students during evenings and over weekends to compensate for the lack of learning during plasma lessons. At times even this became contradictory to its purpose, as further questions arose amongst parents about teachers' activities during ordinary school hours, as students and teachers were engaged in education seven days a week. These extra efforts eventually died out, since they were not remunerated or officially acknowledged as part of career development for teachers. In fact they were indirectly discouraged, since they undermined the efforts put into the plasma teachers by the governnlent. Total media solutions to educational issues are hence questionable mainly because of educational concerns, not to mention their technical vulnerability, especially in the case of rural schools. These schools are affected by the uncontrolled power of nature, manifested in the inconsistency and unpredictability of electrical power supply and repeated failures to receive satellite images, as well as a shortage of petrol for generators. Unprepared and deprofessionalized teachers and students simply sit idle until 'the show' is put on stage again.

It is difficult to refrain from commenting when one realizes the damage the plasma teachers do to students, teachers and education in general. Outrage arises when one understands that this is systematically planned and installed through neo-liberal common sense under the official banners of development and improvement through efficiency and transparency for the good of the citizenry. This centralization of curricula and lesson development operates to create external control and ultimate profits for some, because plasma screens and pre-recorded media lessons are expensive and require the involvement of World Bank loans for countries like Ethiopia. This is occurring while the meagre local government revenues are used to pay teachers who are reduced to plasma television operators and who are nicknamed DJs (disc-jockeys) by students.

Most importantly, plasma teachers remove critical thinking from the teaching and learning process and introduce the delivery of packages as the qualifying entity to success. The lessons from the Ethiopian scenario clearly show that education is a commodity available on the global market, whether in Ethiopia or in South Africa, where the plasma lessons are developed.

The Namibian experience

Promising counter-actions to the model described above have been developed in Namibia. The teacher education reform process in Namibia started at a national level in

1993 with strong support from international donor agencies like DfID (UK), NORAD (Norway), Sida (Sweden) and USAID (USA). The national teacher education reform was both an attempt to continue what had been developed in exile as part of the liberation struggle and an attempt to disrupt the second-tier legacy of apartheid education. This scenario was complicated by the new marketplace for international actors that Namibia's independence created, seen by some donors as a testing ground and springboard for future support in a 'new' South Africa (Dahlstrom, 2002).

The Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) was developed as a national programme during the 1990s when the neo-liberal tendencies in the education sector were not as aggravating and aggressive as today. Rather, the most significant influence came from the changes in the East-West dichotomy that had started to be dissolved and was replaced by the discourses of globalization, which from a subaltern perspective initially was discursively recognized as an indication of inclusion, but with obvious displacements not least in the political arena. At that time, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) was transformed from a liberation movement into a political party with governmental power and related long-term effects also on educational influences and outlooks, mainly pressurized by external political forces.

Dahlstrom (2002) identified three major areas for the war of position over the preferential right of interpretation in the teacher education reform process. These were (1) the creation of an imperative reform framework, (2) the altering of programme imprints and (3) the shaping of institutional agency. The two power blocs in this war of position included both international and national identities. These identities operated strategically together at times and at other times followed their own agendas. What came out of this process was a transposed reform in a layered society. The transposed reform was moulded through a prolonged reform process and an intellectual war of position. This war of position was framed by two dichotomized positions. One was a conceptual basis of a visionary society carried through from the liberation struggle through critical pedagogy and the other was a structural basis of a layered society with roots in the previous apartheid system through neo-liberal and neo-behaviourist educational ideas. The question posed today is what has happened with some of the traits that had their background in the 'visionary society-critical pedagogy' bloc of counter-hegemonic ideas and practices? To look into possible answers to this question we will analyse developments within the conceptions and practices of critical practitioner inquiry (CPI).

Critical practitioner inquiry in the South

CPI belongs to the critical action research camp that emphasises contextual studies as a basis for practical interventions. An early description of CPI reads: 'CPI is an educational approach based on a critical pedagogy, which addresses unconventional education issues, broadens the base for what is recognized as common knowledge

about education and develops a more dynamic relationship between education theory and practice. It also goes beyond conventional research methodologies in an attempt to develop tacit educational knowledge into professional educational repertoires' (Dahlstrom 1999). The background to CPI is found in educational initiatives in Botswana and Angola in the 1980s. At that time local school-based alternatives that followed a critical tradition of learner-centred education were developed as joint activities with teachers and students in village primary schools in northern Botswana. These efforts were different from the activities analysed by Tabulawa (2003) as part of the spread of neo-liberal capitalism and learner-centred education through a contemporary USAID-sponsored project, which eventually gained a hegemonic position in] Botswana during the 1980s. The localized efforts to establish a critical alternative developed into aperies of reading materials in both Setswana (the national language in Botswana) and English. This material was based on contributions from teachers and students, and printed by the Teaching Aid Production Unit (TAPU) in Francistown, under titles such as *Makaleng - our village, Mr Molobe's minibus and other stories* and *Voices from children in Cape Town, South Africa,* the last example based on an exchange cooperation with a children's magazine, *Molo Songololo,* in Cape Town.

The initiatives in Angola were carried out as part of a teacher education programme called the Integrated Teacher Training Programme (ITTP) for untrained and exiled Namibian teachers working in a refugee camp organized by SWAPO during the liberation struggle. The school projects that these teachers carried out as part of their training were embryonic versions of future CPI reports dealing with issues related to the teachers' daily activities in the classrooms, integrated with contextual and theoretical perspectives. When independence came in 1990 the ITTP continued as an alternative programme for the training of primary school teachers in the northern part of Namibia until the national reform process started in 1993. During the period 1990-1992 the CPI approach was further developed through school support projects, a teachers' magazine called *The Frontline Teacher* and other publications as integrated parts of the training programme. The ambition was to further the community-related and critical pedagogical practices that had started in exile and to show examples of alternative developments before the national reform process started.

CPI became a concept in the new BETD programme in Namibia, developed jointly by the then two ministries of education, namely the Ministry of Higher Education, Vocational Training, Science and Technology (MHEVTST) and the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (MBEC), organized under the National Institute of Educational Development (NIED), where many of the international donor agencies were also housed. The general steering document for the programme, the BETD Broad Curriculum, identifies eight professional themes. These themes are the central focus around which the programme is organized throughout the three years of studies. One of these themes is 'developing a critical inquiry approach into one's own practice and context (MHEVTST & MBEC 1998: 6). This theme relates mainly to the students'

school-based studies and studies in Education Theory and Practice, two central parts of the programme. CPI originates from critical pedagogy and its introduction into the BETD represented ideas that according to Dahlstrom (2002: 186-187) -

- attempted to break with the common reductionist view that educational practice was applied theory;
- challenged the preferential right of interpretation, which academics had assigned to themselves over educational practice;
- acknowledged the development of theories *about* practice as an academic area in its own right, but did not recognize the reduction of these theories to technical dogma that practitioners were expected to follow;
- supported the development of a theory *of* practice based on practitioner inquiry;
- supported the documentation of accounts of educational change, which collectively contributed to a written knowledge base of education.

The report on the impact of CPI in the BETD programme published as an Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) document (ADEA 2005) shows that there are inherent potentials in the CPI approach but also problems with its application in the BETD programme. Van Graan (2005: 63) concludes her assessment of the impact of CPI in three points:

- Being critical and critical reflection do not happen automatically, although all educators interviewed are aware that it is good practice and realize the need for it to happen more continuously.
- A CPI model cannot be adopted if teacher educators feel unsure of the model. To get more confidence in the model is to have at least a thorough understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of critical theory and constructivism that inform this model.
- Critical reflection is not going to happen overnight; those committed to its implementation need to keep the vision alive. However, this can only happen within a clearly defined policy framework for Educator Development and Support.

A review by Carneal (2001: 1) of a publication with selected CPI reports written by Namibian educators (edited by Dahlstrom (2000)), including teacher educators and teachers, states

> ... instead of scholars passing down knowledge, the practitioners in this book are creating it on their own by accessing and reflecting on academic literature and their personal experiences. It is a book about people involved in education and the daily life of a classroom practicing what they preach through the use of "practitioner inquiry" and "action research" to improve their teaching techniques, get messages across, and ameliorate the educational environment.

The need for teacher educators to experience CPI in their role as practitioners was soon realized. Therefore, all teacher educators at the four colleges were offered the opportunity to attend courses with the aim of carrying out inquiries into their own situation as teacher educators. This opportunity was used by a total of 78 teacher edu-

cators during the period 1992-2000, i.e. around 50% of all teacher educators from the four colleges of education, even though the large majority came from the three traditionally black colleges in the northern parts of the country. The executive summary of the ADEA (2005: 15-16) document reports that 'teacher educators value critical reflection as a strategy for solving problems and changing practice', but also that many teacher educators 'have a shallow and poor understanding of CPI, in that it operates on the technical rather than the critical level'. The ADEA report also concludes that some BETD graduates continue to use CPI in their teaching after training.

As Dahlstrom (2002) notes following a Gramscian analysis of the reform process, a core group of organic intellectuals, grounded in conceptions about liberation that was engraved through the opportunities in the reform process, carried the reform further through individual and institutional agencies. However, a combination of new career opportunities amongst the organic intellectuals, thus leaving the colleges or moving to administrative posts, and the recruitment of teacher educators from the traditional intellectual camp (read: University of Namibia) undermined the reform inscriptions and created transposed practices also in the area of CPI. Thus, CPI moved closer to a technical rationality, in line with neo-liberal ideas. In addition, the introduction of the BETD programme was an uphill struggle for those who believed in its philosophical, political and educational intentions in line with CPI. The uphill struggle was created by the historical imprints in the minds of those who had served the previous 'regime of truth' that had created an educational tradition based on 'religious metaphysics and Anglo-Saxon empiricism' according to Callewaert (1999: 228). Powerful donor representatives who carried with them neo-behaviourist or neo-liberal preferences of modernization supported these imprints. The third 'problem' was the foreign academic scholars (sometimes named 'suitcase academics') riding high on their powerful positions, who were all sceptical of CPI and similar 'progressive' ideas. This led to a situation where the philosophical, political and educational basis for the new reform was soon left behind at the drawing table, i.e. as promises in steering documents. Meanwhile, the invisible crafts of the liberal virus surfaced as worries about efficiency, control, competencies and observable outcomes. These worries were soon transformed to implants of more neo-liberal managerial aspects, teacher-proof control mechanisms, reductionist views on curricula and syllabi issues, a return to a focus on testing, and the transformation of programmatic initiatives like the CPI into technical rationalities.

Although the challenge of neo-liberalism is eminent to the education system in the South, the CPI is still a critical counter-hegemonic force in Namibia and elsewhere, like Ethiopia, as indicated in the works of teacher educators like Hussein (2006) and others. Ali (2005: 4) concludes his reflection on a Masters course in Ethiopia for university lecturers that followed the CPI approach as follows: 'I would now argue that unlike the age-old assimilative philosophies of the north, CPI is open for assimilation and contextualization. CPI can be systematically adapted to fit the current African

context and the need to transform unjust institutional and societal structures. I strongly believe that CPI is indeed a pedagogy of hope for Africa - a pedagogy that could serve as a vehicle for dialogue among cultures and civilizations by paralyzing hegemonism, monopolism, and other stumbling blocks to such a dialogue'.

We have learned the following about the hegemony of neo-liberalism in education systems of the South from the two scenarios of Ethiopia and Namibia:

1. In the former Ethiopian case, the education system was already exposed to the colonial capitalist movement in Africa, particularly during the reign of. Emperor Haile Selassie in the 1970s (Zeleza 2004). That exposure has made the Ethiopian system highly vulnerable to the neo-liberal virus, as its transformation into the globalization system by way of plasma teachers was quite easy and rapid.
2. The latter Namibian scenario saw CPI founded in refugee areas during the struggle for independence. Semi-liberated Namibians, detached from the hegemony of the North, had only each other and the trees under which they were learning. Critical thinking emerged from their own contextual experiences. It is this development that is now falling prey to globalization and commoditization of education through the conditional donations of the World Bank. This might drive the Namibian education system further away from its critical and contextual approach. However, thanks to the resilience of the Namibian education system it is still thriving and overcoming the commoditization of education and the suppression of contextual and critical development of education by furthering the humanistic ideas on which the post-independence educational policies and CPI rest.

Transformative characteristics of the liberal virus

In general, the liberal virus has a tendency to transform what have been introduced as critical pedagogical alternatives like action research (including its 'progressive' branches like CPI) and learner-centred education (LCE) into technical rationalities that fits the commoditization of education. Thus, CPI is stripped to a device for more efficient classroom management and LCE becomes a way for teachers to escape their educational responsibilities either through meaningless group work that recycles ignorance or through the replacement of teachers by an image on a screen telling alien 'truths'.

The transformative character of neo-liberalism is played out through its invisibility. This invisibility creates an imaginary consensus that gives the impression that we are all talking the same language and that we in principle also want the same things to be accomplished. For example, who can question learner-centred education if by that we discursively mean that the learner is at the centre of education? This consensus gets under our skin as common sense and becomes taken for granted. When the consensus has entered this docile stage the road is open to reduce educational practices into technical formulae easy to measure and manage to create the desired efficiency and

control. This process, following in the footsteps of Thatcherism, will wash away all tendencies towards critical pedagogical perspectives and practices. Tendencies that scholars and practitioners might want to bring into the educational arena as signs of 'education' in its sense of *Bildung,* i.e. something broader and deeper than common formal education and schooling aiming at the production of 'useful' consumers, will eventually be considered redundant.

Neo-liberal processes in transition are difficult to detect. They have a treacherous face validity that is often coupled to the 'freedom' discourse, which can be theoretically analysed through the concept of governmentality. The neo-liberal governmentality reconfigures people as productive economic entrepreneurs of their own lives and the education system is an efficient institution for such reconfigurations to create the 'docile subjects who are tightly governed and who, at the same time, define themselves as free' (Davies & Bansel 2007: 249).

For'the sake of preserving the right to be critical and remain on top of solving contextual problems of one's own community using any and all available resources, further investigations are necessary. It suffices to suggest the following:

1. Investigate the various approaches of the liberal virus that overwhelm the education systems of the South in the name of 'free' trade and 'freedom' of choice.
2. Develop strategies for counteracting such aggressions in national and local community arenas and sustaining the right to be critical in order to learn from one's own contextual practices.
3. Investigate mechanisms to mobilize democratic forces from both the North and the South to protect the principles of CPI and other critical aspects of education systems of the South from being engulfed by the liberal virus.

It is only when we are faced with examples of the 'ultimate solutions' of the neo-liberal processes of transformation of educational practices, like the plasma teacher, that we realize the enormous damage it causes to students, teachers, teacher education and the populace at large. However, there is still hope that critical practitioner inquirers and other dedicated educators, who continue to subscribe to their responsibilities as organic intellectuals, can make a difference and use the degrees of freedom available in hegemonic times, and remain optimistic as suggested by the title of a book by the oral historian Studs Terkel (2003): *Hope Dies Last: Keeping the Faith in Difficult Times.*

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