Teacher education and quality teaching in a globalizing world: A socially critical cautionary tale

Dr Greg Burnett
Division of Tropical Environments and Society
James Cook University
Cairns
Australia
Email: greg.burnett@jcu.edu.au

Introduction

I wish to start by acknowledging the organisers of the International Conference on Teacher Learning and Development … and also former colleague Dr Sabry Ahmad. The sheer fact that I am here speaking to you in this forum is tied very closely to the theme of the conference and also the ideas I wish to share with you in this presentation, that is, Teacher education and quality teaching in a globalizing world: A socially critical cautionary tale.

Teacher education in a globalizing context: A personal story

You see the ideas I wish to share on "quality teaching" and "teacher education" in an inter-connected world grew considerably for me in 2010, and a few years either side, when I was involved in a "twinning project" between my then university - the University of Otago in New Zealand and IGPM Batu Lintang in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. This "twinning" project resulted in multiple trips from NZ to Malaysia by myself and NZ colleagues. On one of those occasions some NZ teacher education students came too. Then there were hosting visits in NZ by Batu Lintang academic staff and of course the Batu Lintang students themselves who did two years of their teacher education degree at home in Malaysia and two years with us in NZ.

It was during this time that I was introduced to the character of Si Tanggang who, as you will all know better than me, "received" a global education of sorts and on his return home failed to recognize his own mother. But also during this time I was privy to the Batu Lintang students who in a University of Otago cultural night performance re-wrote the ending of the

popular tale so that, in their minds at least, it was possible to "receive" an education that held both the values and knowledges of 'home' in equal esteem with the values and knowledges of 'other places'. This is exactly what Jacques Delores (1996) and UNESCO challenged us all with at around that same time, that is, the need to somehow affirm both the local and the global, the spiritual and the material, traditional and modern, universal and the individual etc etc … in the work we all do as educators in a globalising world. Again in those years I developed and taught an International Education paper to our NZ teacher education students. These were students that were always destined to teach in NZ but thankfully the university they were enrolled in allowed space in their degree to think and study globally. This is something that is not as easy to do in my current Australian university. I was able to link up my NZ students with the Batu Lintang students in an online teacher education discussion forum that eventually lead to both groups of students meeting one another at Batu Lintang in Kuching and also in NZ. When I accompanied my NZ students to Kuching for a week long field trip we were witness to Delores tensions of globalization being played out before our eyes, for example, being met by the red Teletubby outside a Kuching Primary school and having to make a decision whether to eat bamboo chicken with stingray and jungle shoots at Al Fayads or a Big Mac at McDonalds. Not that such tensions were non-existent in NZ … it was just that they stood out more for us while were away. Dr Sabry at that time guest lectured into my International Education subject. I still remember a story he told my NZ students about the frog coming out from under the coconut shell … this as a way of helping us all to understand the dynamics and tensions around quality education in a globalizing world of increasingly porous borders. I looked upon Dr Sabry as being at the cutting edge of these tensions himself as an experienced Malaysian educator doing doctoral research at a New Zealand university at that time. From my perspective he was living it.

A necessary re-framing of teacher education

So … what does "quality education" and "teacher education" look like in a globalizing world increasingly marked by the sorts of mobilities I have described? And I might add … what did John Urry (2002) say in regard to mobile sociology? If people themselves are not crossing borders of many kinds like the NZ and Batu Lintang students then knowledge, values and beliefs certainly are. Urry argues that we need a paradigm shift in the way we think about sociology, and by implication a sociology of education … for too long it has been heavily

place-based and contingent. For some of us as teacher educators it might mean starting to think sociologically even to start with … because the psychological and cognitive paradigms still dominate teacher education in places … but more than that it means letting go of the nation-state as our chief referent for education policy and practice. So since those Batu Lintang years I have been wrestling with these sorts of questions … and I'd like to think that my colleagues and also the students, who would be by now experienced teachers themselves in Malaysia and also New Zealand, are wrestling with the issues also.

Allow me to share some further thoughts over the course of this presentation and perhaps we too can do some wrestling with them in the discussion time we have at the end.

Reading social constructivism against the grain

I wish to start by troubling the broad notion of social constructivism … considered best practice pedagogy in my own current Australian and my previous New Zealand teacher education programmes and of course by extension the wider systems of schooling in both countries and the formal curriculum and policy documents of the two places. These are the sorts of pedagogies that our "International partners" are often encouraged to embrace. Who do I mean by "International partners"? By International "partners" I mean the international education students we receive into Australia and NZ at both tertiary and secondary school levels; the foreign aid and consultancy experts we sent out; the individuals and groups we share educational research with … and debate with in the usual sites of academic exchange, including conferences like this one. I also include here teacher education providers in other countries that we "twin" with as well as the offshore campuses, that many Australian universities have in other parts of the world. My current university - James Cook University in Qld has its Singapore campus where Singaporean Early Childhood degree students learn to base their teaching practice on "play-based pedagogies" and "learning story assessment processes" all grounded in the Australian Early Years Learning Framework or EYLF (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, n.d.) … believe it or not these Singaporean early childhood teachers also learn appropriate sensitivities to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners … a section of the wider Australian community whom they are never likely to encounter in their professional lives! I am finding it a challenge to question such an exchange. Why would that be do you think?

We in this part of the world have long tended to give social constructivism a central place in our teaching reportoires … its evidenced in our formal national curriculum and policy statements and is "passed down" to emerging teachers by our teacher education providers. Social constructivism can be described by the standard markers of: learner centredness; inquiry learning; teacher as facilitator' cooperative learning … and a particular physical classroom environment. Quite often supported by the socio-cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky (in Whitton et al, 2016) it is almost an unquestioned true-ism of Western forms of teaching and learning. My Pacific regional teaching and research experience tells me that for several decades there has been a critique of social constructivism from a cultural difference perspective … at least in the Oceania region. In this part of the world there is a skepticism and suspicion of such pedagogies mostly from an anti-colonial perspective (Thaman 2009; Teaero, 2007; Taufe'ulungaki, 2003). This is one where it is claimed there has been a general epistemological violence experienced by Pacific people at the hands of Western imposed forms of schooling which includes not just imposed content knowledge but also imposed ways of teaching and learning … imposed pedagogy. The critique has emerged over the way such pedagogical practices tend to push to one side and generally disavow more local cultural and Indigenous forms of teaching and learning. It's an anticolonial critique based on a fear that after 12 years in a liberal child centred classroom it might indeed be possible to forget not only ones mother but also one's own language, identity and that of the whole extended family and community. It's an anticolonial critique that has produced a re-indigenising, reclaiming 'push back" … in the Oceanic region at least and perhaps in other parts of the world too. One of the ways in which this "push back" appears is in the form of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* … consider *Article 14* (United Nations, 2007) for example and the rights to an education in one's culture and language that need to be safe guarded.

The geo-political underpinnings of social constructivism
There is, however, perhaps something more insidious at play than mere cultural and identity loss. International education and Comparative education theorists such as Karen Biraimah (2008), Richard Tabulawa (2003), Lyn Carter (2010) and others alert us to certain geo-political dangers of taking such pedagogical practices across national borders. To these

theorists learner centredness has a rather profound political consequence. Quite often here in the liberal democratic West we take such approaches to teaching for granted. It takes a deep dive into the comparative education research and debate to get a sense that others do problematize the ideas. At its most simplest they see the relationship between teacher and learner in a socially constructivist classroom being remarkably similar … too similar … to the relationship between the state and the individual in society more broadly. The socially constructivist call for learners to be responsible for their own learning and teachers as mere facilitators of that learning parallels the life experience of a citizen in a liberal democratic nation state being responsible for his/her own life chances - the bearer of their own risks - and that state's withdrawal from social policy implementation. In other words socially constructivist pedagogies are merely a logic of the neoliberal state which highly favours the values of individualism and entrepreneurialism … when they are taken up elsewhere they become, according to these critical comparative educational theorists, a form of liberalization of otherwise collectivist societal relations by stealth. It is also perhaps no surprise that a discourse of resilience has become part of Australian and NZ educational rhetoric. Resilience is increasingly considered a trait that all learners must possess. Where as once we talked about education for social transformation we now talk about young learners being taught to bounce back from adversity and disadvantage that they might be experiencing. Cautions abound in the comparative education literature … ponder too this statement from O'Sullivan (2004) in the African Namibian context of educational consultancy and development. An embrace of social constructivist pedagogies in some non-Western contexts might be undermining the ways in which adults generally relate to their children.

These are the ideas that flow from the West via those conduits of globalization I mentioned earlier - international student mobility; Western aid consultancy and research; twinning and off shore campuses and so on. Consider as an example only, the rationale used by Australia's Dept of Foreign Affairs and Trade for entering into development partnerships, including those related to schooling and education systems generally, with developing world countries. Sure promoting growth and ending poverty are there but the aid relationships are hardly altruistic as you can see in that second and third criterion (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2016). National self interest is also a criterion. This is what Tabulawa

(2003) and others mean. The consequence of the liberal ideas around quality teaching and learning is to fit out an individual to become a compliant member of the global marketplace … a market place dominated by the West. They are not ideas about teaching and learning, as Lyn Carter (2010) reminds us, that are grounded in empirical educational research that says children learn better if they are implemented, but instead highly geopolitical and contingent. You see, its never just teaching … a simple taking up of educational ideas from another place in the hope they might work elsewhere. There are of course cultural risks but there are also risks of a more political nature.

A teacher education response

How to make sense of this? How should these ideas be received? To what degree do they affirm or rub up against local views of what constitutes appropriate and locally determined teacher/learner relationships … and by extension the wider sets of relationships between individuals in society and in turn society with the state? What might the rationale be for non-Western others partnering over these pedagogical ideas in the first place? Way back in 2010 I used to ponder what the rationale for the twinning project between my NZ teacher education institution and Batu Lintang really was. I think we are all aware of the global tertiary education market place? I know my NZ institution benefitted enormously in economic terms from the relationship … but what were the benefits that flowed in the other direction? In my own work as an academic in the wider Oceanic region but now situated in Australia on the Pacific rim I ponder the same questions. What are the benefits that flow to local Pacific peoples, what one of my current colleagues refers to "our Eastside neighbours" (Boulard, 2018), through the numerous educational conduits of student mobility and so-called expert educational consultancy? It is perhaps here that sustainability needs to be considered - the sustainability of local cultural practices and values but not only that but also local social and political systems - through education and in particular the choices teachers make concerning the work that they do.

As part of the sense making process Ive found that metaphors work well for me. In this case the metaphor of a "beach" is helpful. I share it with you. It comes from critical anthropology and the work of Nicholas Thomas (1991) … some time ago now. I also draw on the work of historian Greg Dening (2004) who also uses the beach metaphor. Again, I do apologise for

drawing on my experience of teaching and researching in the wider Oceanic region from which the metaphor comes. You see the beach is a liminal place … meaning an in-between place … in between the land and the ocean … in between two very different worlds … the beach is not quite land but neither is it quite watery. For Oceanic people it has always been historically a site where locals meet strangers from other places … it's a place where the familiar and strangeness meets … it has also been a place of trade and exchange. I suggest to you that our ever-globalizing classrooms are a form of beach. Nicholas Thomas (1991) argues that when foreign objects first crossed the beach in initial encounters, whether they be tools, weapons, clothing, goods of some kind they never came with their purpose inscribed. Those on the receiving end have always had enormous potential to subvert the intentions of those introducing the objects. As educators we can extend the metaphor to include values, beliefs, ideas … also pedagogies, forms of teaching and learning, curriculum, knowledge generally, assessment … all the trappings of our own schooling and education systems. Michael Singh (2005), in the context of Australia's tertiary education sector attributes high degrees of agency to the high numbers of international students who study in Australia. He terms them "ethnographic fieldworkers", sources of understanding and agential in the way they consume their Australian university degrees. Somewhat related, Greg Dening (2004) argues that the footprints of strangers on a beach are not to be automatically considered footprints of trespass … but instead signposts as he calls them. In terms of our ever globalizing classrooms this might also be applied. Learner centred constructivist approaches to teaching and learning might also be considered as signposts … there for critical consideration only, to then either be rejected, accepted or modified … as they cross the beaches of our classrooms, university lecture theatres and international conference venues. Doherty & Singh (2005) describe learners, adult learners, and maybe the education systems that lie behind them, in terms of being "purposively nomadic", exploiting opportunities and then moving on. That's the way I like to envisage both our Malaysian "twinning" students and host students in NZ … "purposively nomadic" … agentially and critically engaging with the ideas of the other but not letting them erase completely existing core values and understandings about how their home cultures and societies work.

Learning-centredness and teacher education

So how do we translate this metaphor into practice? What does it mean for us who teach and research in education? I can only respond to that as a teacher educator … in my role as one who teaches the teachers. Time does not permit a full discussion but its primarily about constituting our teacher education students as professionals with a critical consciousness. We must equip our teacher education students with a broad sociology of education that allows them to make links between their learners and the wider social and societal context that teaching and learning occurs in. We need to get our teacher education students to resist the simple idea that it is "just teaching" … and those common technicist approaches to teaching and learning that I suspect exist in all of our different communities … models built upon a simple transfer of skills … from those who know to those who don't. We need to expose our teacher education students to multiple models of teaching and learning. Certainly, in the Australian and NZ contexts diverse models of practice do exist. I share with you three particular typologies of teaching that I seek to use with my students - Tiffany Jones' (2013) conservative, liberal, critical and postmodern approaches to teaching; Mary Kalantsis & Bill Cope's (2008) mimesis, synthesis and reflexive approaches to teaching; and Steven Kemmis and Peter Cole's (1991) neo-vocational, liberal progressive and socially critical approaches. Teacher education students need to be exposed to each and then challenged with the following questions: "If we teach, for example, in Jones's "conservative" way which is primarily behavourist in nature, then what might be the consequence for learners now and in the future?"; "If we teach in Jones's "critical" way, which is primarily social justice oriented, then what might be the consequence for learners now and in the future?" .... and finally ... "How then are you going to teach?" In framing up our teacher education programmes in this way we are advocating for a "learning centred" approach (Schweisfurth, 2013) rather than a "learner centred" approach. Its more than just a clever semantic shift. In a learning centred approach teachers are then equipped with a critical professional consciousness to make valid self-determined choices about how then to teach based on their particular local circumstances. I admit to a degree of idealism and about the ideas because all teachers are bound by the systems within which they are employed. As we have said earlier, education systems are notoriously bound by the perceived needs and priorities of the nation state in which they are situated … but perhaps there are degrees of wriggle room? I leave it with you. Lets open it up for some discussion. Thank you for listening.

References

Australian Government Department of Education and Training, (n.d.). *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Retrieved from: https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia_0.pdf

Biraimah, K. (2008). Education for Equitable Outcomes or Educational Inequality: A Critical Analysis of UNESCO's Education for All and the United States' No Child Left Behind programs. In J. Zajda, L. Davies & S. Majhanovich (Eds.), Comparative and Global Pedagogies: Springer.

Boulard F (2018). French classes in Australia need to acknowledge our Pacific neighbours too. *The Conversation*, 15 August 2018.

Carter, L. (2010). Neoliberal Globalization and Learner-Centered Pedagogies: Posing Some Different Questions, *Canadian Journal of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education, 10*(3), 223-231.

Delors, J. (1996). *Learning: The Treasure Within: Highlights from the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century*, UNESCO Publishing.

Dening, G. (2004). *Beach crossings: Voyaging across times, cultures and self*. Melbourne: Miegunyah Press.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2016). *Australia's Aid Program*. Retrieved from: http://dfat.gov.au/aid/Pages/australias-aidprogram.aspx.

Doherty, C. & Singh, P. (2005). How the West is Done: Simulating Western Pedagogy in a Curriculum for Asian International Students, in P. Ninnes & M. Hellstén (Eds) Internationalising Higher Education: Critical Explorations of Pedagogy and Policy, (pp. 53-73). Comparative Education Research Centre, University of Hong Kong.

Jones, T. (2013). *Understanding education policy: The four education orientations framework*, Dordrecht: Springer.

Kalantzis, M. & Cope, B. (2008). *New Learning: Elements of a Science of Education*, Port Melbourne: Cambridge.

Kemmis, S., Suggett, D. and Cole, P. (1991). *Orientations to Curriculum and Transition: Towards the Socially-Critical Schoo*l, Melbourne: Victorian Institute of Secondary Education.

O'Sullivan, M. (2004). The reconceptualisation of learner-centred approaches: A Namibian case study, *International Journal of Educational Development, 24*, 585–602.

Schweisfurth, M. (2013). Learner-centred education in developing country contexts: From solution to problem? *International Journal of Educational Development 31*, 425–432.

Singh, M. (2005). Enabling Transnational Learning Communities: Policies, Pedagogies and Politics of Educational Power. In P. Ninnes & M. Hellstén (Eds), *Internationalising Higher Education: Critical Explorations of Pedagogy and Policy* (pp.9-36). University of Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre.

Tabulawa, R. (2003). International Aid Agencies, Learner-centred Pedagogy and Political Democratisation: A critique, *Comparative Education, 39*(1), 7-26.

Taufe'ulungaki, A.M. (2003). Vernacular Languages and Classroom Interactions in the Pacific. In K. Thaman (ed.), *Educational Ideas from the Oceania* (pp. 13-35). Institute of Education: Suva.

Teaero, T. (2007). Eutia moa mai nanoa: Navigating currents of literacy and numeracy in the Pacific. In P. Puamau & F. Pene (Eds), *The basics of learning: Literacy and numeracy in the Pacific* (pp. 154-176), Suva: Institute of Education.

Thaman, K. (2009). Towards Cultural Democracy in Teaching and Learning With Specific References to Pacific Island Nations (PINs), *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning 3*(2), 1-9.

Thomas, N. (1991). *Entangled Objects: Exchange Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

United Nations, (2007). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Retrieved from: https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wpcontent/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

Urry, J. (2002). Mobility and Proximity, *Sociology*, Vol.36, No.2. pp.255-274.

Whitton, D., Barker, K., Nosworthy, M., Humphries, J. & Sinclair, C. (2016). *Learning for Teaching: Teaching for Learning* (pp.41-53). South Melbourne: Cengage.