Critical democratic pedagogy through the arts in indigenous/Maasai rural schools in Kenya

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Renewed language of arts education: 3.8 Interaction between theory and practice
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The emergence of many newly independent countries in the 1960s coincided with a tremendous surge in mass schooling as nation-states began to signal their move towards an ideal of ‘Western modernity’. Educational researchers and policy makers around the world have argued that both the policy initiative of mass education and the ideal of Western modernity have been linked to increasing social, political and educational inequities (Appadurai, 1996; Dei et al, 2006; Fitzsimmons, 2000; Mundy, 2005). Educational policy reform which serves to address these inequities and deepen learning is needed.

It is hoped that through the use of a critical democratic theoretical framework, this paper will begin a critique of the current structure in indigenous schools in Kenya and will introduce the possibilities for a re-construction of the system which values indigenous knowledge and which could deepen educational knowledge and experience. Many educational theorists and researchers have promulgated the values of democracy and democratic practice in education (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1989; and Portelli, 2001). In critiquing the current system, it will be important to ask to what extent it is consistent with critical democratic beliefs, qualities and values: whose interest the current conceptualization serves; and who’s voices are being sought or silenced. This work will take an interdisciplinary approach drawing from comparative international development education, critical democratic theory and educational theory and policy studies.

In his work on emancipatory discourses, Denzin (2008) argues that performance-based disciplines, such as education, can contribute to radical social change, to economic justice, and to a Utopian cultural politics that extends localized critical (race) theory and the principles of a radical democracy to all aspects of decolonizing, indigenous societies. The importance of performativity is not new to Kenyan society.
The power of aesthetic communication is that it both emotes and invokes feelings in both its creators and its recipients (Eisner, 2002). Story-telling through aesthetics, with music, dance & drama is still highly valued with Indigenous communities as ways to know and understand ourselves and the world (Bonini, 2006; Madjidi, & Restoule, 2008).

Traditionally, the Maasai have been a nomadic pastoralist tribe whose territory has spread throughout much of East Africa, including Kenya and Tanzania. For years, they had resisted any form of involvement in the mass schooling system which arose during the British colonial period. This system was based on a deficit model which failed to recognize the value or importance of indigenous knowledge or practices. This paper will begin with a brief overview of traditional Maasai culture, with a particular focus on power relations (social, economic, educational). Secondly, it will examine three major periods in Kenyan/Maasai history: European missionaries; British colonialism; Independence-1963. Thirdly, it will examine the impact of globalization on the current structure and purpose of education in many indigenous (Maasai) schools in Kenya. Finally, it will explore the possibilities for and constraints on critical democratic pedagogy through the arts, to help Maasai youth and their communities blend the traditional with the modern as they continue to learn and grow.

Keywords: critical democratic pedagogy, arts/aesthetics, Maasai

References


