

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Teacher Education in a Context of Military Occupation and Siege: The Power of Purpose

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Research Domain: Higher education policy (HEP)

Abstract: This presentation offers a reflexive account of the experiences of a teacher educator in developing an online teacher training programme for and with teachers in Gaza, Palestine. While transnational higher education can be an example of expanding markets in the neoliberal global academy, it can also be a creative act of resistance in the context of forced immobility. In the light of Rumi's (1207-1273) invitation for critical reflection and Dewey's (1916) concepts of 'trying and 'undergoing', the teacher educator reflects on the lessons learned from working with teachers and academics in a context of military occupation. She underscores the value of the participatory, the relational, and the reflexive for developing transnational higher education projects, and emphasises the value of co-construction of knowledge in developing a shared sense of ownership of the learning process. She foregrounds the collective force of 'wanting to make it happen' for overcoming possible challenges, supporting mutual capacity building, sustaining collaboration beyond funded projects, and promoting global social justice.

References

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education*. New York: The MacMillan Company.

Paper:

"Living the life of the scholar activist not only helps to change the world but also provides an avenue to change yourself"

- Laura Pualido

1. The Beginning

This paper explores some of the complexities of transnational higher education (TNE) as a mechanism

for reaching immobile communities. While TNE can be conceptualised as a neoliberal intervention to expand markets, it can also be an act of resistance and hope in a contexts of military occupation. In 2014, a teacher educator based at a higher education institution in the UK was involved in a large project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). One of the project's objectives was to collaborate with a university in Gaza on setting up an online teacher education programme as a way of recognising the human aspirations of besieged teachers in Gaza, creating employment opportunities for them, and helping them defy occupation. (Fassetta, et al, 2017; Fassetta et al, forthcoming). When the teacher educator started working with her Palestinian colleagues, many questions emerged: How does it feel to develop a situated teacher education programme with and for in-service teachers under military occupation and siege? What are some of the underlying opportunities and challenges? What pedagogical theories would underpin such programme? What are some of the ethical issues involved? What can we learn from such experience that will enable us to continue to support teachers in Palestine and in other international contexts of human suffering? What can we learn from such encounter for ourselves as teachers in higher education, and as human beings? The situated teacher education programme was co-constructed informed by a spirit of resistance and hope. It rested on five interconnected pillars: context, language, (critical) pedagogy, technology, and creative arts, which were developed in the light of the needs of the teachers, and the particularities of the setting.

2. Concepts and Contexts

“And you? When will you begin that long journey into yourself?” was an invitation by Rumi (1207 - 1273) to each one of us to reflect on our lives, and derive understandings therefrom. Similarly, in his seminal text, Dewey (1916) discusses the nature of experience, which he perceives as involving the dual active ‘trying’ and the passive ‘undergoing’. The nature of experience can be understood only by noting that it includes an active and a passive element peculiarly combined. On the active hand, experience is *trying*— a meaning which is made explicit in the connected term, experiment. On the passive, it is *undergoing*. When we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return. Such is the peculiar combination. The connection of these two phases of experience measures the fruitfulness or value of the experience. (Dewey, 1916, p. 163, italics in original) Following Dewey, an activity in itself does not amount to experience. Rather, it is the extension of the understanding of the activity to also include the impact of such activity on oneself that develops an experience; when our understanding of change comprises both the change caused by our action and that caused upon us as a consequence. To “learn from experience” is therefore, about making these connections of acting and being acted upon (ibid, p. 164). In the light of these understandings of ‘trying’ and ‘undergoing’ the teacher educator looks back on her experience of working with the teachers under military occupation and siege. In doing so, she questions the concept of ‘capacity building’ prevailing in international academic work and asks *whose capacity?* Reflecting on her experience, the teacher educator foregrounds the central role of the relational, the participatory, and the reflexive in developing the training programme, and the importance of co-construction of knowledge in developing a shared sense of ownership of the process. As she was working with the teachers, she recognized the power of purpose for overcoming possible challenges, and promoting global social justice. The teacher educator compares her experiences with the Palestinian teachers to the pre-packaged teacher education programmes that are ‘delivered’ (often at high cost) across international contexts of higher education with little or no collaboration with the

participants themselves or a careful consideration to the particularities and complexities of their contexts.

3. A Journey into Oneself

Looking back on her experience of working on the project, the teacher educator recognises key benefits to TNH as a form of resistance. She realises how much she has learned from working with the Palestinian teachers for her own personal and professional development. For example, as technology is the lifeline for besieged teachers, they introduced her to technological tools that they themselves use. She also learned new ways of translating critical pedagogy (e.g., Freire, 1973) into actual arts-based learning activities. She learned about what it means to be a teacher under military occupation and siege, how colleagues perceive their roles as educators (Jebril, 2017), and the kind of responsibilities they feel they have towards their students. More importantly, she learned – and continues to learn - new ways of being and becoming a teacher.

References

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education*. New York: The MacMillan Company.

Fassetta, G., Al-Masri, N. Attia, M., & Phipps, A. (forthcoming). Gaza teaches Arabic online: opportunities, challenges and ways forward. In: Phipps, A., Al-Masri, N. and Fassetta, G. (Eds.) *Can you hear me? Engaging multilingually in online international academic collaborations when borders are impassable*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Fassetta, G., Imperiale, M. G., Frimberger, K., Attia, M. & Al-Masri, N. (2017). [Online teacher training in a context for forced immobility: The case of Gaza, Palestine](#). *European Education*, 49(2-3). pp. 133-150.

Freire, P. (1973): *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury

Jebril, M. (2017). *Academic Life Under Occupation: The Impact on Educationalists at Gaza's Universities*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. The University of Cambridge.

Pulido, L., 2008. FAQs: Frequently Asked Questions on Being a Scholar/Activist. C. R. Hale (ed.), *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics and Methods of Activist Scholarship*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 341-366.