

Book Review: Decolonizing Transcultural Teacher Education through Participatory Action Research Dialogue, Culture, and Identity by Jean Kirshner and George Kamberelis

Decolonizing transcultural teacher education through participatory action research, culture, and identity sketches the laborious process of decolonizing the education in Belize in Central America. It consists of 9 chapters: introduction, review of the literature, methodology, findings and discussions (3 chapters), as well as the conclusion.

In the first chapter of the book, the authors describe the history of their work with educators in Belize, Central America. They discuss the difficulties, negotiations, breakthroughs, and challenges they encountered in enacting effective professional development across cultural lines of difference in their initial focus on materials and instructional programs. Jean, one of the authors of the book, narrates her entrance to Belize with a medical mission in 2007 where she met the principal and teachers of the school nearby the hospital. She adds how the condition of the school made her think of a lifelong commitment to the teachers and educators in Belize and to co-found the Belize Education Project with other members of the medical mission and another teacher. She further explains that her colleagues in Belize, as well as the United States, would have to become deeply committed allies to work toward decolonizing pedagogies since they were from two different cultures- one impacted by colonialism and the other having colonizing tendencies.

From 2007 to 2014, Jean gathered teams of elementary school teachers, principals, and professors from the United States to join her once a year in conducting professional development on literacy education in Belize. The team changed some surface-level instructional strategies and reconfigured some aspects of classroom environments in the first seven years. However, the work seemed superficial and unsustainable since teachers from Belize and the United States still had separated mindsets about the nature and functions of literacy, teaching dispositions, and instructional practices. In search of solutions for these disconnects, she started to work with Dr. George Kamberelis at Colorado State University and shift her ways of working to a more Freirean approach.

In chapter 2, they explain how working side-by-side with their colleagues in Belize, it became clear that they had very different life experiences influenced by very different cultural forces. It made them feel the necessity of achieving ever-increasing clarity about the history of colonialism and its impact on Belize. Thus, the whole chapter is devoted to the history of colonialism in Belize and its continued impact on Belizean teachers' personal and cultural identities.

In the third chapter the authors explain that based on their reading about participatory action research, Freirean culture circles, narrative theory, and phenomenology, they came to know that three cultural tools namely; Freirean-like

dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifeworlds have great impacts building and sustaining relationships between and among people in their work, professional development work, as well as research. They came to know that identity is an important factor for exploring how educators from different communities of practice collaborate to reflect upon and reimagine the potentials of literacy learning and teaching in elementary school classrooms. Therefore, they started to focus on interactions since identity is constructed and reconstructed through dialogues. Following Bourdieu (1977, 1990), who argues that social field and individual agents (*habitus*) are connected phenomena that are produced through practice, they came to see that both the learning and the knowledge they gained from Belize Education Project might be fundamentally grounded in their ever-evolving relationships. Additionally, thinking about colleagues' stories made them realize the profound implications of conducting research based on genuine dialogue, sharing life stories, and becoming involved in the lives of others. They came to appreciate the fact that new understandings seemed to be emerging from the collective work, especially the work of relationship-building.

Chapter 4 is devoted to introducing the context, participants, data gathering instrument, and data analysis method. They found Participatory Action Research (PAR) the best approach to their research since they wanted to engage in research that might extend the reach of "human flourishing" to the entire Belizean region where they worked (Heron and Reason's, 1997). They explain that Belize, a country with a poor economy, is located in Central America. Based on the economy of the country, the absence of educational resources in classrooms, low pay for teachers, few books are among the problems in the school. The students come from large families who see literacy as a ticket to future opportunities. They add that the research was conducted with 18 male and female educators from Belize aged 22 to 55.

The data of the study was collected from a multitude of sources including semi-structured focus groups and personal communications of various kinds such as face-to-face and online dialogues. They also composed field notes and used anonymous reflections composed through evaluative responses by their colleagues and collected stories about their lives as well. Finally, they went through the data analysis applying the thematic analysis approach and reported their findings as a narrative or series of narratives since a narrative approach offers insights for readers that are rarely found in other approaches to rendering research findings.

From my perspective, chapters 5, 6, and 7, which present and discuss the findings, could be considered the most

interesting chapters of all. Chapter 5 is one of the chapters devoted to findings and discussions. It focuses on accounts of stories from different participants and in chapter 6 they explain that within the context of the deepened relationships which they established and newly configured selves, they created changes some of which were even troublesome. They discuss the multi-generational forces of the family on these teachers' lives, the influence of their early childhood experiences in the classroom and the ways these experiences influenced the teachers' tools on managing behavior in classrooms, as well as their perspectives on an ideal climate and culture of a community of learners. Additionally, they describe the journeys the teachers embarked on to become teachers and the challenges of becoming a teacher without a formal education in teaching. The chapter then ends with Belizean teachers' visions about their students and themselves which helped them work collaboratively in co-creating professional development. Finally, chapter 7 illustrates how transforming relationships and power relations, transforming/transformed identities, transforming/transformed practices led to small but significant changes in their instructional practices, and their instructional practices led to increased student learning when measured in both quantitative and qualitative ways.

Chapter 8 is composed of autoethnography, in other words, the individual journeys of key participants in Belize in their own words, and from the lenses of their lived experiences concerning this work. The chapter also includes dialogues that took place between 2019 and 2020 in interviews and focus groups. Moreover, they narrate the experiences of Belizean participants as they navigated effective work in a cross-cultural context which was still deeply affected by the continued presence of colonial beliefs, policies, and practices.

Chapter 9 presents the conclusion, implications, and the authors' final thoughts. They explain how their cooperation brought them to the sacred spaces of each other's

classrooms and caused them to realize their collective potential to be transformed and transformative. They believe that their work gives acknowledgment to the power of collective struggle and success through dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifeworlds to build an increasingly committed, knowledgeable, and united teaching partnership. They further explain that Freirean-like dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing life worlds in their work not only changed the project itself but the researchers of the project as well. It caused changes in the ways of thinking and acting, in what goes on in the Belizean classrooms, the culture of education in the schools, and the community in which these schools are located.

Overall, features such as the smooth and delicate narrations of the authors, the detailed features of the context which may not be known by the majority of the readers, a rich and thought-provoking review of relevant literature, and the use of PAR as the data collection method make the book a welcome addition to the field and allow readers to obtain a full grasp of the project. The chapter devoted to participants' autoethnography makes the book a good candidate for a standard text for those concerned with qualitative and narrative writings.

REFERENCES

- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (1997). A participatory inquiry program. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(2), 274- 294.

Mona Hosseini*

Faculty of Education, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

Corresponding author: Mona Hosseini,
E-mail: mona.hosseini@monash.edu