



Education for Community Cohesion Conference

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Community Cohesion and Genocide Education

Introduction

This text provides a summary of a presentation given by George K. Njoroge on 7th July 2009 as part of the 1st *Education for Community Cohesion* Conference at Kigali Institute of Education.

Genocide is a weighty subject. The global community has continuously and loudly talked about 'Never Again' whenever it has happened, but genocide is a persistent problem that has produced and that continues to produce the deaths of millions of people. After Rwanda in 1994, we have had genocidal and ethnic violence in Darfur and most recently there have been outbreaks of ethnic conflict in Kenya in 2008. Genocide cannot be ignored, because it is a threat to the core of the existence of humanity. And of course, just after a genocide, it is difficult to envision community cohesion being re-established again. In my presentation, I will explore the links between genocide education and community cohesion in further detail.

Fundamental Conceptions of Community

Laszio (1997) describes a community as 'a group of two or more individuals with a shared identity and a common purpose committed to the joint creation of meaning.' In the current Rwandan context, the joint spirit of Rwandanness is regularly invoked. This raises questions about what we mean Rwanda to be and how we can co-explore the Rwandan social and cultural landscape together. This also relates directly to questions of personal responsibility, i.e. how involved are we in creating a new Rwanda and how far do we own Vision 2020. More generally, this also implies that we ask ourselves whether we have a sense of responsibility for our actions and how committed we are.

There are of course various dimensions of community. They can be located at the community level, institutional (school/institute/college) level, and locational level, i.e. where the institution exists (in a village, division, district etc), at national-Rwandan, (East-African) regional level, (African) continental level and at international level. As humans and at whatever level we are enjoined in all the dimensions and cannot ignore any of them.



I understand Community Cohesion as a way of being together harmoniously despite differences, while sharing civic values and a sense of citizenship. For example, I would argue that it does not matter that one is tall or short, light skinned or dark skinned. Issues that matter are instead questions such as what values guide us as Rwandans and what it means to be a Rwandan citizen. Community Cohesion entails a way of being together with individual authenticity and interpersonal harmony so that persons function with a shared vision and energy that goes beyond the sum of the individual energies (Scott, 1987). This calls for the existence of a common vision, a sense of belonging and a shared conception of life. By not being committed to a shared conception, a person becomes an outsider. Aristotle (1955) describes as an essential cement of solidarity and thus key to community cohesion a shared conception of the good. I understand this to mean that community and individual growth are closely related and that personal choices made relate closely to a sense of responsibility not only to the self but also to the community. This means being an actor, having a sense of presence and one's presence being tempered for the sake of others who equally have a right of place as oneself.

Genocide Education

Levinas (1994) writes that 'true learning consists in receiving the lesson so deeply that it becomes a necessity to give oneself to the other. The lesson of truth is not held in one's consciousness. It explodes toward the other.' Despite efforts to teach about evil, evil has persisted and has been manifested in genocide and the most horrendous ones being in the 20th and 21st centuries. I would argue that the Levinian true learning has not taken place all this time and therefore justifies a continuous search for an engagement with genocide education. I agree with Kennedy who perceives genocide education as a triadic engagement that encompasses the following aspects:-

1. *Genocide education is education about genocide.* This means that learning and teaching about genocide entails an endeavour to be aware and knowledgeable about its patterns, common factors that alert about possible future occurrence and the uniqueness of each genocide etc.)
2. *Education against genocide* means that learning and teaching against genocide is about creating awareness of how we permeate hatred, divisionism, isolation, dehumanization in society. This process is essentially about learning how 'othering' comes about and how this process can be transcended. This includes a conjoint effort to recognize when 'othering' and manipulation exists or manifests itself in a community. It is also a process of developing ethical and moral courage to identify and strongly condemn divisionist ideology and propaganda before it is entrenched deeply into the human psyche. This process of developing personal courage must transcend our own tendencies towards dehumanization of others despite great pressure. For example, Jews were named lice and vermin, Tutsis were named snakes and cockroaches, and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia named their victims dogs



3. Prevention of genocide requires that persons who have learnt about genocide translate their knowledge into action. Persons must be actors. They must be ready to act to ensure that the annihilation of humanity has no place in community.

In relation to learning and teaching about, against and acting to prevent genocide there is no neutral pedagogy. In genocide education there is no place for neutrality because the very act of neutrality is a signal of an uncaring stance. Instead, I would argue that individual action and a strength of will is required and this is what dealing with genocide is all about. Fundamentally and generally, there is also a need for critical imagination which assumes a pedagogic position that is humanistic oriented

Synergies between community cohesion and genocide education

So far, I have discussed community cohesion and genocide education as separate. However, I believe it is crucial to consider these two aspects as synergetic. A nation cannot progress without educating its people. Education that is emancipatory must be based on fundamental human values that guide conduct and interaction between people. Progress cannot be achieved where there is no sense of common purpose. Where a sense of common purpose and will exists people act to transform community in positive ways at all levels.

Community cohesion will not see the light of day if there is dehumanization, degradation, hatred, divisionism, prejudice, and stereotyping in a given community. While education is a tool for emancipation it has also in history been seen and used as a weapon of destruction and annihilation as manifested in the holocaust and genocide in Rwanda. Therefore, education itself needs to be looked at critically and the synergy between community cohesion and genocide education must be underpinned by praxis. Where a society desires cohesion, it has no choice but to ensure that all degrading tendencies are eliminated through human friendly structures and fundamentally those that promote human dignity and sanctity of human life. To promote community cohesion means creating a conducive environment for personal and community emancipation and this requires persons to be beings of praxis. According to Karl Marx (1972, 1973) praxis is practising freedom in creation of product, self, and community as well as exerting control over the process of production, including construction of the past, understanding of the present, and framing alternatives for the future.

Emancipation from genocidal tendencies and thus growing in community cohesion is a necessity not only for the liberation of the self but also for the community in order to redefine and transform itself into what it should be - sacred.



Conclusion

Finally, I want to conclude with a few final points about education in general. In order to rid ourselves of hatred, divisionism, prejudice and all genocidal orientations, we require an education that kills our self hatred for in hating the other we mirror our hate for ourselves, our inhumanity and sense of hopelessness, and our servitude to the hegemonists of our life in the desecration of those we name 'the other'. It might be worth considering in this instance the metaphor of the butterfly pedagogy as referred to by Martin (2000). He quotes the following imagined dialogue:

Caterpillar to the Butterfly: "How do you become a butterfly?"

Butterfly "You have to be willing to die"

Caterpillar: "Die?"

Butterfly: "Well, it feels like you are dying. But it really turns out to be transformation to something better."

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