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Education for Community Cohesion Conference Introduction

Kigali Institute of Education, 7th July 2009

<http://www.edcoco.org>

Introduction

Good morning, welcome to our 1st DELPHE project conference. I am one of the *Education for Community Cohesion* project coordinators based in the UNESCO Centre for Comparative Education Research at the University of Nottingham's School of Education. I will give a short introduction to today's conference and will start with a project overview.

The Collaboration between the UNESCO Centre for Comparative Education Research and Kigali Institute of Education

I would like to say a few words about the UNESCO Centre for Comparative Educational Research (UCCER, <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/centres/uccer/index.php>). This is an international research centre based in the School of Education at the University of Nottingham. The UCCER is made up of a team of about 12 permanent members of staff ranging from professors to researchers. We also have in the UCCER about 10 Special Professors from a wide range of fields and about 15 full- and part-time doctoral students from all over the world based either full-time in Nottingham for the duration of their studies or part-time in their home countries.

The work of UCCER is very international. Geographically, current and past partners are countries as diverse as China, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana and Rwanda. The work with Rwanda is increasing. The collaboration with KIE is key to this. In this regard, we consider the DELPHE collaboration as only the start of



a collaboration and are currently starting to plan further collaborations. In the UCCER, there is also strong focus on various aspects of Peace Education in the centre with work focusing on Israeli-Palestinian links in the Middle East and increasingly work focusing on community cohesion.

We are pleased to be collaborating with KIE, as one of the leading institutions of Higher Education. KIE and its staff are committed to promoting high educational standards in Rwandan and the entire East and Central African region. We all know that KIE is especially committed to train teachers to a standard that will make a big difference in Rwanda schools. Innovating teachers and interactive teaching practices which contribute to the development of critical thinking are key to KIE's mission. In this regard, we hope that our joint project will contribute to this substantially and will make a contribution to the overall educational development of Rwanda.

Education for Community Cohesion

This conference has come about as one of the first dissemination events of our joint project which is supported financially by the British Council and the UK's Department for International Development (DfID). The acronym DelPHE stands for 'Development Partnerships in Higher Education', focusing on capacity building in the African partner institution. As a project team, we understand this work actually much more to be a genuine partnership between us, as it also allows to deepen our understanding of the relation between teaching sensitive issues and how this can support community cohesion not only in Rwanda, but also in the UK. Gary Mills and Jean Leonard Buhigiro will say more about this in their individual presentations more specifically from UK and Rwandan perspectives.

The project team consists of a range of colleagues from both partner institutions. At KIE, the project team is made up of Bernard Bahati, Jean Leonard Buhigiro (coordinator), Silas Kachuchuru, Hildebrand Karangwa and Cyprien Tabaro. We were also privileged to work with the late Tharcisse Nsabimana who passed away in August 2009. At UCCER, the project is being run jointly by Gary Mills and Rolf Wiesemes (coordinator).



Community Cohesion is a difficult and complex concept – fundamentally, we understand this in a constructive manner, i.e. community cohesion is about enabling people to relate to each other, to understand and accept each other's differences and to maintain and build commonalities. (Cantle, 2005)

The project has originated from a joint interest in developing specifically education about community cohesion and as a part of it genocide education. From a UK perspective, both Gary Mills and myself have been involved in conducting research into classrooms where sensitive issues such as the Holocaust are taught since 2003. We are particularly interested in classroom practices and related evidence and how language is used in classrooms where the Holocaust is taught. Through this work, we started collaborating with the National Holocaust Centre run by the Aegis Trust. Through this link, I was invited to join a study visit to Rwanda with a group of secondary and university teachers in 2006. On this trip, I first met local staff from KMC as well as staff from KIE, in particular George Njoroge.

The project is funded on 3 key principles – dialogue, respect and trust. These key principles are not new. The notion of dialogue is central to a variety of learning theories and philosophies (See for example: Bruner, 1996; Dewey, 1997, 1998, 2002; Freire, 1996, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978) as well as – as Jean Leonard Buhigiro told me yesterday - African traditions of community cohesion. These guiding principles apply to both academics and all students taking part in the project. This is necessary, because we must be able as a team of teacher educators, academics and students to talk openly and respectfully to each other even if we might not necessarily always agree.

As UK partners, we have not come here to tell anyone how to go about teaching about genocide in Rwanda. We might have some ideas how to address the teaching of sensitive issues in the UK and in other European countries, but we would not dare to suggest that we have the solution for teaching probably the most sensitive issue in Rwanda, i.e. to teach children and young adults about the genocide of 1994. So, we would consider the project and more specifically the conference today as a means to develop this dialogue, to discuss, and to raise questions.

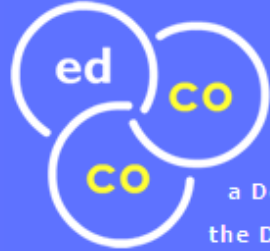


The project focus is on Community cohesion and genocide education. Both Jean Leonard Buhigiro and Gary Mills will illustrate this from our different national perspectives in more detail in their individual contributions. Suffice to say that community cohesion is highly important both in Rwanda and in the UK.

Our project in particular, *Education for Community Cohesion*, focuses on supporting students to develop their teaching about genocide, issues that are highly sensitive and underexplored at the moment. Through our project, we hope to make a contribution to developing our teacher training students (and maybe also to a certain extent ourselves) into confident and reflective practitioners who are able to facilitate learning and teaching about genocide whether it be the Rwandan genocide or other genocides such as the Holocaust, and into teachers who are able to think critically about their own practices. For me, I understand this as getting them to develop pedagogies that facilitate dialogue and deep learning (as opposed to surface learning) about genocide in schools.

In the first year of the project (September 2008 - July 2009), we have worked with History teacher trainees. In the next two years, we will include more historians, but also other subject areas such as Modern Languages, geography, natural sciences and mathematicians with a focus on developing also cross-curricular and whole school approaches for addressing community cohesion and genocide education. Year 1 activities are nearly complete – Gary Mills and Jean Leonard Buhigiro will talk in more detail about our very initial findings. Year 1 activities were meant as a means to develop education for community cohesion and in particular genocide education pedagogies. The activities were mainly conducted via a so-called Moodle website which offers an online highly flexible learning environment that offers a wide range of opportunities for synchronous and mainly asynchronous learning between remote partners. The overall aim of the 1st project year activities was to develop a staged approach that takes into account students' (changing) views, possibly initially very limited teaching experiences, but also allows to build up expertise supported by our activities and related interactions between students and teacher trainers. As a project team we have only just started evaluation of activities, and will be conducting in depth interviews with groups of students tomorrow in order to assess impact so far and to find out how we can develop the activities further.

The project website consists of two main areas. One area is open to the general public and provides information about the project, project partners, the project



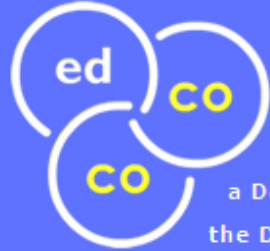
team and its individual members as well as an initial overview of our current understanding of community cohesion. This is further supplemented by a short (but gradually expanding) section on project related research activities. The other key area is the afore mentioned password protected Moodle website which is only accessible to students and project team members. This website area is used as a safe setting for project staff and students to collaborate, develop and discuss a wide range of activities. Generally, the project websites need to be considered as work in progress. Technically, it has been set up so that it can function with limited bandwidth (For this reason, it is not highly visual or video-heavy.) which helps to address some connectivity issues at KIE.

In spite of some technical problems, Rwandan and UK students have been able to start developing joint discussions and dialogue about education for community cohesion and related to this genocide education. Moodle offers the possibility of a variety of online synchronous and asynchronous activities such as discussion fora, wiki pages, chat rooms, links to Powerpoints and video links. In spite of some technical problems, Rwandan and UK students have been able to start developing joint discussions and dialogue about education for community cohesion and related to this genocide education.

Examining the Moodle data to date it is becoming clear that students seem to find concrete discussions of resources and related pedagogies most beneficial - this comment is based on seeing the amount of interactions in the related discussion forum on the Moodle site. Most importantly, it seems that the international links aspect is highly motivating for students. Certainly, the UK students have found these inspiring and motivating.

Project Challenges

When talking about the challenges, I take the sensitivity of issues as a given, because this is part of the project and part of what we are aiming to address. Apart from this, we have some connectivity problems which are due to limited bandwidth at KIE. Another challenge is that there are differences in academic years and systems. In summary, this 1st project year has not been perfect and we were not able to do all of the activities, e.g. we did not manage to do a video conferencing link due to bandwidth and timing problems, but we always



expected this to be a learning process. One clear limitation in Year 1 has been that – although there has been some contact between students from KIE and Nottingham – there have been too few opportunities for contact between UoN and KIE students. We want to address this next year by forming small mixed Rwandan-UK working and buddy groups from the start.

In Year 2, we will also aim to include more students from a range of subject areas. This will probably raise another series of issues both locally and between partners, but we are confident that we will be able to address these as part of the project. Generally, for Year 2 the aim of the project is to widen participation of students. Participating students at KIE start off year 2 activities (introducing themselves and answering initial key questions) which are then taken up by UK students in September and October. Students in Nottingham will be able to access texts put onto Moodle by Rwandan students and will in turn put up their texts and react to Rwandan students. Students in Nottingham will also visit the National Holocaust Centre in early October and report on this visit on Moodle, whilst Rwandan students report on community attachment in October with UK students being asked to comment on community attachment in relation to their English contexts. In summary, we aim to develop a constant dialogue between students and lecturers through an exchange of views and perspectives. This makes the project more complex, but also much more interactive and allows for development of reflective practices and dialogue.

Conclusion

I want to conclude my introduction with a teacher quote from an African Rights report published in 2001.

'You can't hide the genocide, so you must deal with it. People need to talk and to find common ground.'

It's obvious that since 2001 education has moved on and whilst there were only beginnings of work being done in the area of genocide education at the time, this is gradually changing. For example, the education programme at Kigali



Memorial Centre has started, our own project *Education for Community Cohesion* is progressing which Gary Mills and Jean Leonard Buhigiro will talk about in more detail.

All of this work is important, because the key point made by this teacher – ‘you can’t hide the genocide, so you must deal with it’ – remains valid. Teacher trainers, schools and teachers must deal with the genocide and genocide education. We hope that today’s conference and more widely the project *Education for Community Cohesion* will be able to make a genuine contribution to this important work.

I hope we will be able to have a dialogue today about community cohesion and genocide education and hope that you will help us to raise and discuss complex and difficult questions. Thank you for listening. It is now a big pleasure for me to introduce our 1st speaker, George Njoroge, the Rector of KIE, who was instrumental in getting this DelPHE project off the ground.



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