

WorldCanvass: Why School? Education and Social Transformation

Part 3

Joan Kjaer: Hello, I'm Joan Kjaer. Welcome to WorldCanvass, from International Programs at the University of Iowa. Glad to have you with us. This is part three of our program, Why School? Education and Social Transformation. In this segment, we're going to expand our geographical scope and look at these issues cross-culturally. Joining us for this segment are Angela James, senior lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Kwazulu-Natal. It's so nice to have you here, Angela. Thank you.

Angela James: And I'm extremely excited and happy to be here, and I'm honored. Much gratitude.

Joan Kjaer: Thank you, and ours to you. And next to her is Greg Hamot, professor in the UI College of Education. Thank you, Greg.

Gregory Hamot: Thanks for having me come, Joan.

Joan Kjaer: And also, we'd like to welcome ... No problem. And also, we'd like to welcome EunJung Kim, a graduate student in the UI College of Education. Thank you.

EunJung Kim: Thank you.

Joan Kjaer: So, Angela, pleasure to have you here all the way from South Africa. Long flight, I know.

Angela James: And may I tell you, I just arrived after 12 today.

Joan Kjaer: Well, we're just lucky you made it in. And speaking about South Africa, we know that in these past three decades, four decades, there's been tremendous change. Social change, political change. I'm sure the same is true of the educational system in those years. Could you give us an idea of what the South African schools were like prior to the 90s, and what kinds of transformations have you seen in the way schools operate, the way people interact with one another?

Angela James: Okay. Thank you. I think when you speak about transformation, one of the things that we really have to ask is, well, who decides what the transformation is going to be, and why even transformation? Just to go back to the question that you asked about schools in South Africa pre, post-Apartheid, when I think about my own schooling, we all had different groupings, and we all lived in particular different areas, based on your racial divisions or your racial classification. And quite clearly, the policies were really aligned to the different groups that you were in.

Angela James: Policy with schooling was for laborers, and the quality of the schools, I would say, in many instances, were very diverse, with highly-resourced schools and extremely poorly-resourced schools. And I must say presently, I could tell you that there are still very poorly-resourced schools presently in South Africa. I mean, when a child falls in a pit latrine, because of inadequate sanitation at a school, that is really unacceptable. Not in this day and age, especially since we are over 20 years in democracy.

Angela James: So, when I think about the inequalities that are present across the schooling sector, yes, there have been developments with regard to the curriculum and the fact that across all the schools, if you think of government schools, there's one curriculum, which is now in place. And I think that is a good development at this point in time. And the fact that also, there is recognition with regard to indigenous knowledge systems, when in the past, that was not even thought about. It was not even given any relevance whatsoever.

Angela James: So, those types of aspects, and looking at gender, taking the gender aspects into account. Taking, for example, assessment policies and the whole aspect with regard to the types of knowledges that we need to be focusing on, and the relevance of that knowledge for the various groups of children that we have in our schools.

Angela James: We really need to consider that we still do have schools where there's so much violence that is happening. And when you start asking questions about why is there that type of violence, and why are there these poorly-resourced schools? I mean, I can take you to a school where there are no windows present in that school. Windows is a small thing. But are the teachers fully qualified being with the children in those classrooms all the time?

Angela James: And really, what we need to think about is, what is schooling ultimately, and what is it that we should be working with within each of our communities in which we have our schools? And yes, we have private schools and government schools, and our government schools are arranged in quintiles, from quintile one, which is no fee paying, to quintile five, which were the so-called ex-model C schools, or the ex-white schools in the past. And children are attending these schools all across the divide.

Angela James: But I think what is essentially important for me is, do we understand our children, and is it about a child attending school and ticking the box that the child has attended school? Or is it about how we are creating the possibilities and the opportunities and the freedom for the children to be? I may not just be talking about the South African context, but I am also saying that there are a number of different aspects that need to be taken into account.

Angela James: And I know that for some of the schools in South Africa, some of the things I've just spoken about now are in place, and are actually happening. But is it for the majority? No, it's not. And isn't that what education should be about? Where

we consider every single child, no matter who, what, where that particular child is, and who the parents are, and what particular economic setting they actually come from. And even the political.

Angela James: I think so often, the political and the economic drive education, which is not and should never be the case. It is about communities, understanding what it is, not in terms of their needs. We must move away from that thinking. But in terms of their desires. If we work with desires, then we are actually looking at how we are enhancing every single person, and really working with the mind of an individual.

Angela James: Who am I? What is it that I am capable of? And at what point do we actually work with children, so that they get to that point where they can understand exactly who they are? Now, maybe not exactly, but they are on the road. It's a journey. But they can understand who they are into becoming the types of people that they would like to become, as well.

Angela James: So, yes, I've answered your question, but more in a roundabout way, in getting us to think more broadly about these particular aspects. And in terms of the social injustices that are in place in education, they are very apparent across our schools.

Joan Kjaer: What kinds of initiatives are there, on the national level, perhaps, to address these concerns? Are there some?

Angela James: Yes, there are, as I have spoken. Obviously, at different levels. There would be, within the government sector, looking at the curriculum and the structure of the curriculum across all the schools, and the fact that there's now one common curriculum, and there's an understanding ... well, there is an understanding in terms of policy, but we could question it in terms of implementation, and the preparation of teachers, and also the access to resources for all of these initiatives to be implemented in the most effective ways possible. So, it would be at the curriculum level.

Angela James: It's also within teacher professional development, and looking at the policies that are present there as well, too. Across all the universities, there are concerns with teacher professional development. There is consensus about what it is that one needs to be looking at. In the past, each person did ... not each person, but each institution did as they thought would be the best possible for the student teachers, or preservice teachers as we say it today. So, even at the teacher professional development, there are definitely policies with regard to that.

Angela James: There's a lot of initiatives with regard to STEM education, and from the government sector, from NGOs. There are NGOs, for example, like the Eskom Expo for Young Scientists, which really gets so many young people out into different ... it's a competitive field, but it's really unpacking and understanding

the dimensions with regard to research and the investigations that one has to do. But that's not the only one. There's also developments in robotics that are taking place across the board. There are so many types of Olympiads.

Angela James: So, there's a complexity, and there's really, I would say, a commitment from various sectors across the board, whether it is from industry, it's from community-type organizations, it's from educational settings, for there to be development across the board with regard to education. But I do want to say, it also is about the will of the teacher in the classroom as well, because ultimately, it's the teacher and the child that have that intense relationship.

Angela James: So, in education, it's relationship that matters. What types of relationships are there within the school setting? You could even look at, for example, a principal and teachers. What types of relationships are there in those types of settings, as well? So, any development that takes place does take place on different levels, but it's about the intimate aspects, and the connections that one has amongst different sets of people that is entirely important, as well.

Angela James: If a child is not comfortable where he or she is, or where the child is, then how does one expect that child to really grow in that type of setting? I don't want to say be educated. I do want to say grow, because there's a lot in terms of how the child sees himself or herself within those particular settings.

Joan Kjaer: Is there thorough racial integration, or do kids go to schools that are near their homes, again marking economic privilege throughout the schools?

Angela James: Well, we do have a policy where children in districts ... obviously, you attend the school in your district, and already, that's a marker, because districts are so clearly divided. And in the past, we had areas that were called township areas, and those were the areas where only black people lived. Those areas are still in place today, and they may not be called a township as such, but quite clearly it's a lot of people who, economically they are not absolutely privileged, and the schools, I must say, some of the schools in those particular areas are really fantastic schools.

Angela James: And you can get ... I actually do this activity with the students where we read an article which looks at the A+ performance of learners from a very rural school, with really, the resources are so lacking in that school, but the children perform so well. So, the questions we need to ask are, is it about, do resources really make a difference, or is the presence of resources just an enabler for the performance to just be a bit better?

Angela James: So, yeah, I want to raise a lot of questions about that, but certainly, there are issues with regard to the different schools, the different settings, the access to resources. The access, for example, to computers. Our first year, a lot of our first-year students come in, and they've never laid their hands on a computer.

And so, we have to then have classes for these particular ... computer literacy classes for these particular students.

Angela James: And I think that's the important thing, is that we need to understand, who are our students, and what is it that we could be working with in order for us to enhance them, to levels where they can really just fly.

Joan Kjaer: Well, thank you. Thank you so much. I'd like to move next to you, Greg. You've been here at our university for quite a long time, and you've been deeply involved in global education, and you've obviously been educating future teachers through the College of Education for a very long time. You're also the associate director for the UI Center for Human Rights, and have spent no small amount of energy studying education outside the US. What are some of the observable differences in education in democratic societies, as opposed to authoritarian societies?

Gregory Hamot: Well, the basic difference is that, in a democratic society you have, at least idealistically, you have a critical eye toward all values, mores, beliefs, with the notion of some sort of reconstruction of society, reconceptualization of it in a progressive sort of way. You can do that in an authoritarian society, because it will collapse. It can't examine itself. It would implode, basically.

Gregory Hamot: And as a result, an authoritarian society has a very set ideological framework that cannot be erred from. And we do too, in a democratic society, by the nature of the beast, but the ideal is for it not to be ideologically set, but to be intellectually ... I think the words that have been used are interrogated, disrupted, deconstructed, and so on and so forth. That, in essence, should be the difference between an authoritarian and a democratic system of education.

Joan Kjaer: So, you have done a lot of work and spent a lot of time in post-authoritarian societies, and looked at education there. What can you tell us?

Gregory Hamot: It was absolutely fascinating listening to my colleagues in the first two panels, because of course, you know, I'm an American educator, as are they. But I kept imagining to myself, what if you ... we have a lot of problems to deal with, but what if you woke up one morning, and the democracy that we have, however you want to define it or evaluate it, is no longer here, and we're a theocracy? What do you do now?

Gregory Hamot: And so, in all the seminary countries that I worked with, they literally went to be one night totalitarian, woke up the next day, democratic. Which is a mind-boggling shift in social psychology. It's a mind-boggling shift in shifting from learned helplessness to I'm on my own. And so, what I've learned is that if you're going to do that, if you're going to overthrow the previous paradigm and shift to another one, in this case the democracy, if there is no preparation, which is usually not the case ... or, is usually the case, when there's no

preparation, you have to start with the youth in the country, because the adults are pretty much, the boat has sailed. The ship has sailed.

Gregory Hamot: And so many times in these countries, I've seen that all the resources go to the top, and not to the educational system in this transformation from an authoritarian to a democratic society. The mere process is simple as something like, something we do in our classrooms very commonly would be have a discussion.

Gregory Hamot: When we first began working with the Polish Ministry of Education in 1991, my colleagues went back, and they were university professors. They were developing a teacher education program, the people I worked with at that time. They said, "That was a great idea, but our students got into fistfights." Because prior to the dawn of democracy in Poland, there was the professor, and they professed, and the student listened and memorized, and that was the way things went. The didactic method was very straightforward. The idea of having one's own opinion and having to warrant that assertion or opinion with facts and data was an unknown concept in education.

Gregory Hamot: So, it was challenging in that regard to help develop a sense of, what is it you need? And there's a philosopher, former ... lay philosopher from Columbia University by the name of Jacques Barzun, who wrote an article called Can Democracy Be Exported? And the answer to that question, I agree with him, is no. But it can be imported. A country has to be able to look at the rest of the democratic world and say, what parts of this fit our sociocultural existence, our sociopolitical existence, that we can build upon with our youth? Because spending it all on the adults is not going to work, or at least that's what I've found out.

Joan Kjaer: What about the role of human rights in education?

Gregory Hamot: Globally, or here in the United States?

Joan Kjaer: Well, maybe both.

Gregory Hamot: Well, here in the United States, it's virtually nil, and I don't mean that derogatorily or pejoratively. If you look at the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, you will see a lot of the Bill of Rights in it. So, we have not ignored the Universal Declaration of Human Rights so much as teach it by not knowing we're teaching it, in many cases. Not that we teach it well or that we accomplish much. That's up to the students to decide, and the parents.

Gregory Hamot: But globally, in democracies, it has become the foundation of their constitutional structure, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. So, when I worked in, for instance, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, you have to work with the curriculum design and development from what it is that's commonly shared, and the one thing that's commonly shared in all of these democracies is their

constitution. And so, when we had to analyze these constitutions to see what exactly it is that these countries are hoping to achieve, you could see the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights written between every line, practically.

Gregory Hamot: So, in some ways, the rest of the world that has turned democratic since the fall of Communism has probably got more of a human rights educational vein in their system than we do.

Joan Kjaer: You shared a thought with me: educating for democracy as a habit of mind. What does that mean?

Gregory Hamot: That's something that I stole from a guy named John Dewey. John Dewey and his work, along with all kinds of people who succeeded him, focused on an interesting concept at the turn of the last century that hadn't been really considered, or at least hadn't gelled, which was the idea that democracy is not the institutions. Democracy is the way we think, or as he wrote, how we think. And the idea of having a problem, an issue, a trend, or something that you are dealing with interpersonally and intrapersonally, which means it projects from you to the society in which you live, is something that requires all of the best available evidence to bring to bear in resolution of that problem.

Gregory Hamot: So, in a multicultural society, like ours, or South Africa, it gives you a remarkable amount of information, of perspectives, and so on, to apply to issues and problems. To separate people from each other in educational systems would be to deny each of those groups the others' inputs, and would deny them that habit of mind of, let's come to a consensus on the best idea.

Gregory Hamot: And this is really what democracy is, at least to me, is the ability for all voices to be able to contribute to the solution, and come up with the one that is both in our own self-interests, our enlightened self-interests, as de Tocqueville called them, and the common good. And that's a pretty tricky balance in society, to be able to pull those two things off.

Gregory Hamot: But that's why sometimes democracies don't succeed. And as you can see in Eastern Europe, particularly in Hungary and Poland right now. You can see it in Russia, obviously, there is a retraction, too, of the authoritarian society. Life is a lot easier when someone tells you how to do it than it is when you have to figure it out yourself with your friends and your colleagues and family.

Joan Kjaer: Right. Well, thank you so much. Now, I'd like to go to EunJung. And you're from South Korea. You're a teacher in South Korea, and now you're getting your PhD at the University of Iowa. So, there have been social and demographic changes happening in today's South Korea. Can you tell us how those changes affect education?

EunJung Kim: Yeah. Korean society has been experiencing a lot of change in terms of demographics, because of an influx of foreign workers from mostly Southeast

Asian countries and China, and also the increase of international marriage, that affects actually the total government and policy, in terms of education. The Korean government initially took their first step of multicultural education in 2006, and since then, we have been implementing multicultural education in South Korea in our educational system.

EunJung Kim: So, this is very new to us, because our society used to be a homogenous society, in terms of the demographic, the ethnic background. But now, we have different types of people, in terms of cultural and also race and ethnicity, of course. And these are changes into Korean educational system, because our teachers had never experience multiculturalism before 2000, but now we have to implement all multicultural education. This gives us challenges and possibilities to embrace different types of society. How can we create for our next generation? The demographic change challenges us, and also gives us a lot of possibility to education, or special educators.

EunJung Kim: For me, I never heard the term multicultural education when I was in school, even in college. We also had a big, long-held notion of single-blooded nationalism. Yeah. So, that kind of historical background actually has been challenged by the demographic change recently. So, that also gives us, as a teacher, huge challenge, or a lot of possibilities for the next generation.

Joan Kjaer: Are people from some of these different ethnic backgrounds becoming citizens of South Korea, or they are just living there as essentially temporary and non-citizen ...

EunJung Kim: Both. Some people who, especially are married to a Korean man, we have an increasing number of international marriages recently. Actually, I'm from a multicultural family, too. My husband is a white male American. Korean families now have a lot of diverse cultural backgrounds, which is very unprecedented in our history. So, these international marriage couples, especially from southeast countries and China, they became Korean citizens. Whereas foreign workers actually have a hard time to be Koreans, because of a strict law about that.

Joan Kjaer: So, because of the multiculturalism and the changes in the needs of education, what are some of the most tangible things that you think have changed?

EunJung Kim: First of all, as I said, I never had actually educational background in terms of multiculturalism and multicultural education, but now every university has at least a basic course, a [inaudible 01:18:55] course, for multiculturalism. There is multicultural education for preservice teachers. This is a huge change. And also, as an inservice teacher, they have a lot of professional development for how to implement multicultural education into a school system.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.



EunJung Kim: And that is also challenging to us as a teacher, because we still have the notion of single-blooded nationalism. That defines, actually, what Koreans, kind of about their Korean identity. But now we have, with different types of cultural background of people, and they became Koreans. But due to the long-held ideology or notion of single-blooded nationalism, Koreans have a conflicted feeling and attitude toward people who have a different background. Like, do they really ... are they really Koreans, or not? It's a big question for us. And that's why I'm passionate about this subject which I'm focusing on as my dissertation. I would like to have more different kinds of Koreans in my country to embrace diverse background.

Joan Kjaer: If you could look ahead 50 years, do you think that ... An older generation will have passed away, presumably, who really had the single-blooded notion in their minds and in their experience. Do you see South Korea moving in this direction, where it's much more fully accepted?

EunJung Kim: I hope so. Yeah. Truly, I really want to see that different future, because I had a serious experience even in my country on the street with my daughter. Not everybody actually thinks like that. Of course, maybe people think my different type of family on the street is the future of Korean society, but at the same time, older generation, people from older generation, they thought, it's kind of tainted into their pure blood concept of what Korean is.

EunJung Kim: One of my harsh experiences was, it happened on the subway with my daughter, and actually with my husband, too. One old guy, old person, was very nice to us, actually, asking where my husband came from, and all kinds of questions. But as soon as my husband left, got off the subway to meet his friend, and the guy's attitude totally changes to me, like saying ... He mumbled, actually, not facing me directly, but mumbled, "These days, the young generation just get married to foreigners, and our old blood got tainted." He didn't exactly directly say it to me, told me, but you know he was talking about me, and everybody heard, actually, on the subway.

EunJung Kim: So, I hope ... I was angry, actually, but at the same time, as I got off the subway, what can I do for my daughter? She was little, so she didn't know what was going on exactly, but at the same time, she's going to have that kind of experience sooner or later when we go back to Korea. What can I do as a teacher, or what can I do as a mom? That's why I want to focus, actually, on my study. I'm going to educate at least my students, and I'm going to work on this long-held concept with my co-workers, my teachers, right? So, that's why I'm working on this dissertation, too.

Joan Kjaer: Well, thank you so much. It's great to have you here. And I'm afraid we've come to the end of our segment, but boy, I want to say thank you very much to Angela James, to Greg Hamot, and to EunJung Kim. And thanks to all of you for coming tonight, and everybody listening to the program. This was the final WorldCanvass of this season. The new season begins in September, and I hope

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we'll see many of you then. All WorldCanvass programs are available on iTunes, the Public Radio Exchange, and the International Programs website. So, for all of us at the International Programs, thank you very much for being here, and please say thank you to our guests.