Promoting GNH Schools Through Teacher Empowerment: Transformative Action Research as a GNH Praxis

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In October 2010, myself and Ms. Rosalind Cooper were invited to visit the Royal Education Council (REC) in Thimphu and two schools in Paro. Presentations were given at the REC about the South-North Schools Partnership for Global Sustainability, which were also attended by Ministry of Education officials. Following this and further discussions with Mr. Lhundup Dukpa (Program Director, School Education & Research Unit, Royal Education Council) it was decided to develop a Transformative Education for GNH Project. A Project proposal was subsequently submitted and agreed upon by the REC. The Project beginning in January 2011 aims to develop the capacity of teachers from seven GNH Seed schools in Paro to plan, implement and disseminate examples of good practice of Education for GNH.

In this paper I elaborate on some aspects of the Project plan. In particular, I discuss the transformative action research approach and a transformative pedagogy for GNH. Much of what I have written is based on my prior doctoral action research on transformative pedagogy (Bedford 2009). The research involved primary and secondary schools across Europe, and focused on the possibilities and limitations for promoting educational change through teacher empowerment. In this paper I argue that the empowerment of teachers is central to the implementation of Education for GNH. Therefore I have attempted to adapt ideas from my prior work to the different cultural context, issues and aims of the Transformative Education for GNH Project. I firstly discuss Bhutan's educational context and the challenges that the country faces.

Education for GNH: Challenges facing Bhutan's education system
The overarching development goal for Bhutan is the achievement of GNH. This involves a radical transformation of society including the re-orientation of the education system to promote GNH. According to research by the Royal Education Council, Bhutan has made considerable progress in education in recent years. However there are still many challenges that need to be addressed, not least the enhancement of educational access and quality of school education. Here I outline these challenges and separate them into firstly those that are beyond the scope of this project (e.g. overcrowded classrooms), and then those which the project aims to directly address (e.g. pedagogy).

Bhutan faces a lack of school space and resources, with overcrowded classrooms. According to the Royal Government of Bhutan (2008) statistics, 55 lower and middle schools have no laboratory, electricity connectivity is available in only 59% of schools, and only 70% of schools have sufficient water supply. As few as one third of schools have an Internet connection, and about 68% of students have textbooks.

Improvements also need to be made in the completion rate of basic education which is mostly negatively affected by household poverty (Bajracharya, Osmani, Tenzing and Wangyal 2007).

Basic education is free but the costs of clothing, transportation and supplies are beyond the reach of poor households. Furthermore, regional and rural-urban disparities persist in educational provision.

There is a shortage of teachers exacerbated by a lack of teacher training capacity. The shortage is most chronic in remote and difficult areas where teachers are reluctant to work, and where there are a lack of professional development opportunities. There is a low professional esteem and teachers face demanding workloads for which they feel inadequately compensated given the responsibilities they shoulder. As a consequence the profession fails to attract the better students. In pre-service teacher education there are too few faculty in relation to the number of students which undermines the quality of teaching and student support.

As for school leadership, principals are administratively overburdened and lack the autonomy, resources and skills needed to model effective practice and make curricular improvements that have an impact on the classrooms.

In terms of school evaluation, standardized tests create stress for students, and create a sense of failure amongst those who under-perform. Teachers may feel compelled to teach to the tests which can undermine sound pedagogical practice.

Addressing the challenges discussed so far will need political will and economic resources that our outside the scope of this project. However they are important to consider in order to understand the constraints this project faces in aiming to address the following, mainly pedagogical challenges.

According to the REC, Bhutan's school curricula are far removed from the needs of the learner, and the social and cultural realities of the communities. Course content is often theoretical rather than practical and fails to impart knowledge and skills that are relevant to life outside school. Exposing teachers to transformative pedagogy will give them skills needed to make learning engaging and relevant for students that is situated in their cultural realities. Media literacy is one of the themes of the Leadership Training Course, which will provide an example for a relevant and practical real life learning experience.

Teaching remains predominantly teacher-centred and uses a transaction (banking) approach, where students passively absorb the contents that the teacher deposits in their 'empty' heads. Textbooks are designed to exercise declarative memory rather than reasoning and working memory. Textbooks also dwell on when rather than how and why, and hence do not foster higher level thinking skills. Furthermore, moral and ethical reasoning are not encouraged. Students are given few opportunities to participate in the learning process. Test-driven teaching undermines the fostering of skills such as inquiry, learning to learn, critical thinking, problem solving. Transformative pedagogy is a reflective critical and ethical practice. It is inherently participatory, dialogical and experiential creating a learning community with active students involved in the knowledge construction process.

The opportunity for ongoing and continuous professional development and support for in-service teachers also remains inadequate in terms of meeting the current learning needs of the students. There is also a lack of an integrated approach to teacher preparation and professional development. The Transformative Education for GNH project provides an opportunity for on-going professional in-service development that aims to empower teachers to address some of the challenges of the Bhutanese education system. Whilst teachers are generally familiar with the pillars of GNH, there still needs more work done on the implementation of GNH principles and values in their school practice. That is why the project focus is on developing through action research a culture of teacher reflective practice as an on-going process for short and long-term school change.

During the Leadership Training Course participants will develop a post-course action research plan with concrete ideas about how they can use their gained experience to not only impact on their own teaching, but also impact the whole school. This could involve, for example, giving workshops to colleagues around challenges that each school has identified, such as how to include media literacy in activities across the curriculum. A web-based learning environment will support the teachers by providing resources for school transformation and the opportunity to share ideas as part of an on-line network.

In the long-term, if the project proves successful, the Leadership Training Course could be given to another cluster of schools by some of the teachers - in that way having an increasing multiplier effect on transforming the Bhutanese education system through action research. However, it should be borne in mind that some of the challenges facing Bhutan's education system cannot be (at least in the short-term) readily surmounted, and therefore this may place limitations on the scope and success of actions in the project.

Action research for GNH
Action research is an approach that has been widely used in education to bring about school change. It is a practice that involves reflection and action directed at transforming school practices and structures. The action research process involves cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection that could involve an individual teacher or a whole school collective effort to implement GNH values.

There are many types of action research that can be grouped according to their different aims, interests and perspectives. For this GNH Project, critical (Carr & Kemmis 1986, 2005), participatory (Kemmis & McTaggart 1990, 2000) and emancipatory (McKernan 1996; Zuber-Skerritt 1996) action research approaches are the most relevant, as they share a common goal of empowerment of individuals and groups to engage in actions for personal, institutional, and societal change.

Critical action research is based on the Frankfurt school of critical theory and is optimistic about human agency, that is, the ability of individuals to exercise choice to make a difference. As Webb (1990) says:

> While acknowledging the importance of structures in controlling and limiting human action, critical theory expresses confidence in the collective actions of people to change their social conditions by removing obstacles to their freedom (pp. 51-52).

Critical action research is therefore about activism, which is an ethical reflective practice directed at societal transformation to improve well-being. Kemmis (1993) shares this view:

> Critical or emancipatory research is always connected to social action . . . It is thus always critical, in the sense that it is about relentlessly trying to understand and improve the way things are in relation to how they could be better. But it is also critical in the sense that it is activist: it aims at creating a form of collaborative learning by doing (in which groups of participants set out to learn from change in a process of making changes, studying the process and consequences of these changes, and trying again). It aims to help people understand themselves as the agents, as well as the products, of history. (p. 3.)

Furthermore, Elliott (1990) maintains that "the overriding purpose of educational research is to bring about worthwhile educational change"; and "research is only educational when it is directed towards realising educational values in practice. It cannot be dissociated from conceptions of worthwhile educational practices". (p. 4)

Examples of critical action research provide hope for the empowerment of Project participants and school change. McKernan's (1996) writing on curriculum action research highlights the power of critical communities such as the "Collaborative Action Research Network".[1] This network, established in 1976 by John Elliott, has provided many case studies supporting professional learning and educational change through action research (Elliott 1991). Atweh, Kemmis and Weeks (1998) document more examples of action research projects for social justice in education, involving teachers, students and parents, in both schools and universities.

Price (2001) examined the transformative potential of action research with eleven pre-service teachers. Based on their experiences, he unravelled ways in which the teachers were able to make connections between pedagogy, research and change. Gravett (2004) reports on an action research project aiming to "change the perspectives and practices of higher education teachers from a teacher-centred to a learning-centred dialogic approach" (p. 259). Further examples of action research and educational change projects can also be found on-line.[2]

The focus of critical action research on empowerment and agents of change engaging in activism makes it appropriate for the Transformative Education for GNH Project. Lather (1986) refers to such approaches as *research as praxis*, designed to advance emancipatory knowledge, and where "in *praxis* thought and action (or theory and practice), are dialectically related" (Carr & Kemmis 1986, p. 34). Critical action research approaches are also appropriate with their emphasis on collaboration, along with establishing self-critical communities, and a

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[1] Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN): http://www.did.stu.mmu.ac.uk/carnnew/
[2] E.G: Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice, University of Bath, UK: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp
EmTech: http://www.emtech.net/actionresearch.htm
Jack Whitehead's homepage: http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw
Bob Dick's action research resources: http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arhome.html

systematic learning process for the development of activist ideas and actions, their evaluation and refinement.

Some of the action research principles proposed by McTaggart (1989) are also useful for the methodological approach for the Project. The first principle is the use of spirals of planning, action, observation and reflection, and systematically collecting and analysing data. Cycles of action and reflection enable theorising about practice, and putting ideas and practices to the test. The second principle is critical analysis that is essential to the societal change process by keeping one focused on what needs to be transformed. On-going critical analysis is essential for further refining the concept of GNH and also to understanding the threats to GNH and Bhutan's unique development path. The third principle involves systematic data collection and record keeping. The widening of participation as the research proceeds is the fourth principle. In the Transformative Education for GNH Project this is important as participation starts with the training team, then the course participants, and then widens to include the school colleagues of course participants, members of their local communities, the wider public and then international engagement through for example a South-North Schools Partnership.

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Given the importance of teacher empowerment for implementing Education for GNH, the methodological approach for the Transformative Education for GNH Project is based on critical action research. The project plan includes (1) the development of a *Leadership Training Course*, (2) the creation of a web-based learning community (SUSNET), and (3) a timetable for implementation, evaluation and dissemination of teachers' actions for GNH. The work plan fits into spiralling action research cycles with four phases – Planning, Action, Observation and Reflection (see Figure 1 below):

Phase 1	**Planning**	Developing the *Leadership Training Course* and SUSNET.
Phase 2	**Action**	*Leadership Training Course* and Implementation of Teacher's Action Plans Supported by SUSNET.
Phase 3	**Observation**	Evaluation of Actions in Schools (Reports uploaded into SUSNET).
Phase 4	**Reflection** on Phases 1, 2, and 3 followed by next cycle beginning with planning the second *Leadership Training Course*.	

For purposes of evaluation, the indicators for activity/practice to implement GNH contained in the Guide to Advancing GNH (CAPSD 2010) are a good starting point. The indicators are based on "A Proposal for GNH Value Education in Schools" written by Karma Ura (2009).
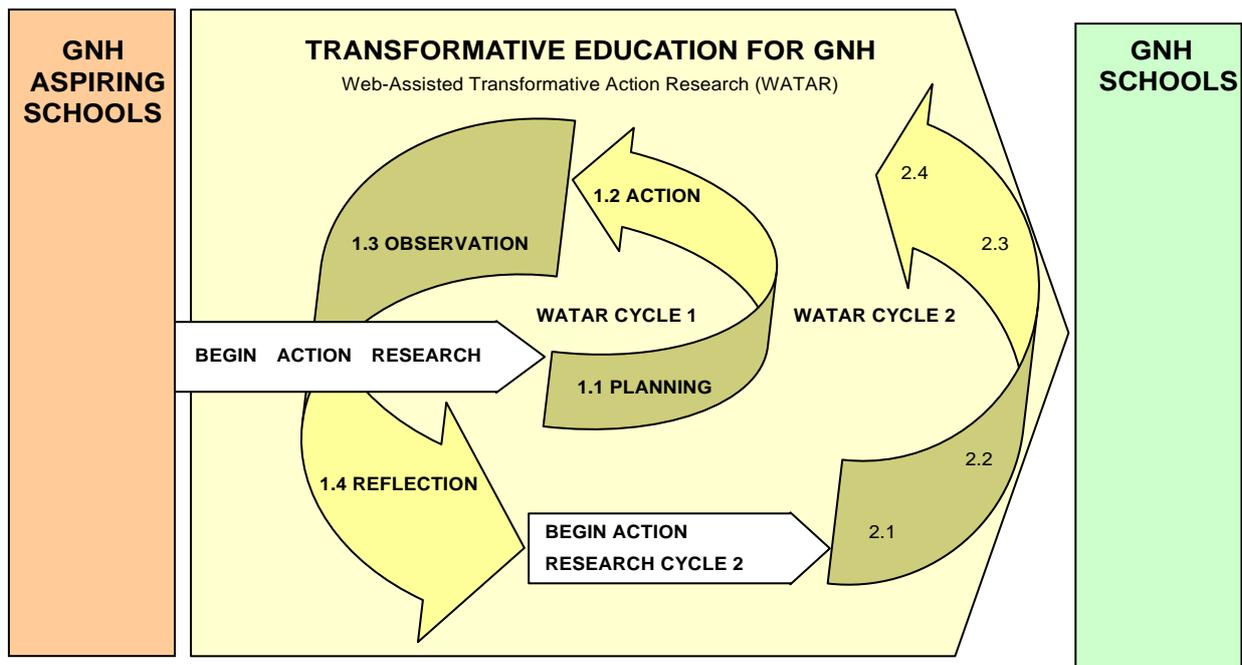
Figure 1: Methodological Framework for the Transformative Education for GNH Project

The web-based learning environment (SUSNET) is an on-line network to support teachers in implementing their actions plans for GNH. SUSNET provides:

- mail and chat communication for project members
- a common workspace for resources on GNH and global sustainable development issues
- a common workspace for resources on GNH and global sustainable development issues
- individual workspaces for schools to document their own GNH actions and share resources
- the possibility for shared inter-school projects and lessons on Education for GNH
- resources on transformative pedagogy, distance education and media literacy
- resources for documentary filmmaking and space for uploading the films produced
- teaching material, project and lesson ideas for GNH and sustainable development

Given the role of SUSNET and its qualities to support teacher empowerment for school transformation, I have called the methodological approach *web-assisted transformative action research (WATAR)*. The approach is characterised by reflection and action directed at school and societal transformation to promote GNH.

Project activities, timetable and participants

The project will be a collaboration between Oulun Lyseon Lukio in Finland and The Royal Education Council in Bhutan. Three teachers from each of the GNH Seed schools will attend a five day *Leadership Training Course* in May 2011. The course will be delivered by a team from Finland and Bhutan. Participating teachers will develop action research, transformative pedagogy, media literacy and ICT skills across the curriculum to implement Education for Gross National Happiness.

At the end of the *Leadership Training Course* each participant will have developed an action plan for promoting GNH in their schools. Using an action research approach described above,

the teachers will begin to implement their plan. After six months participants will write a mid-term report and attend a one-day meeting with the local coordinator to reflect, and develop revised plans for the subsequent six months.
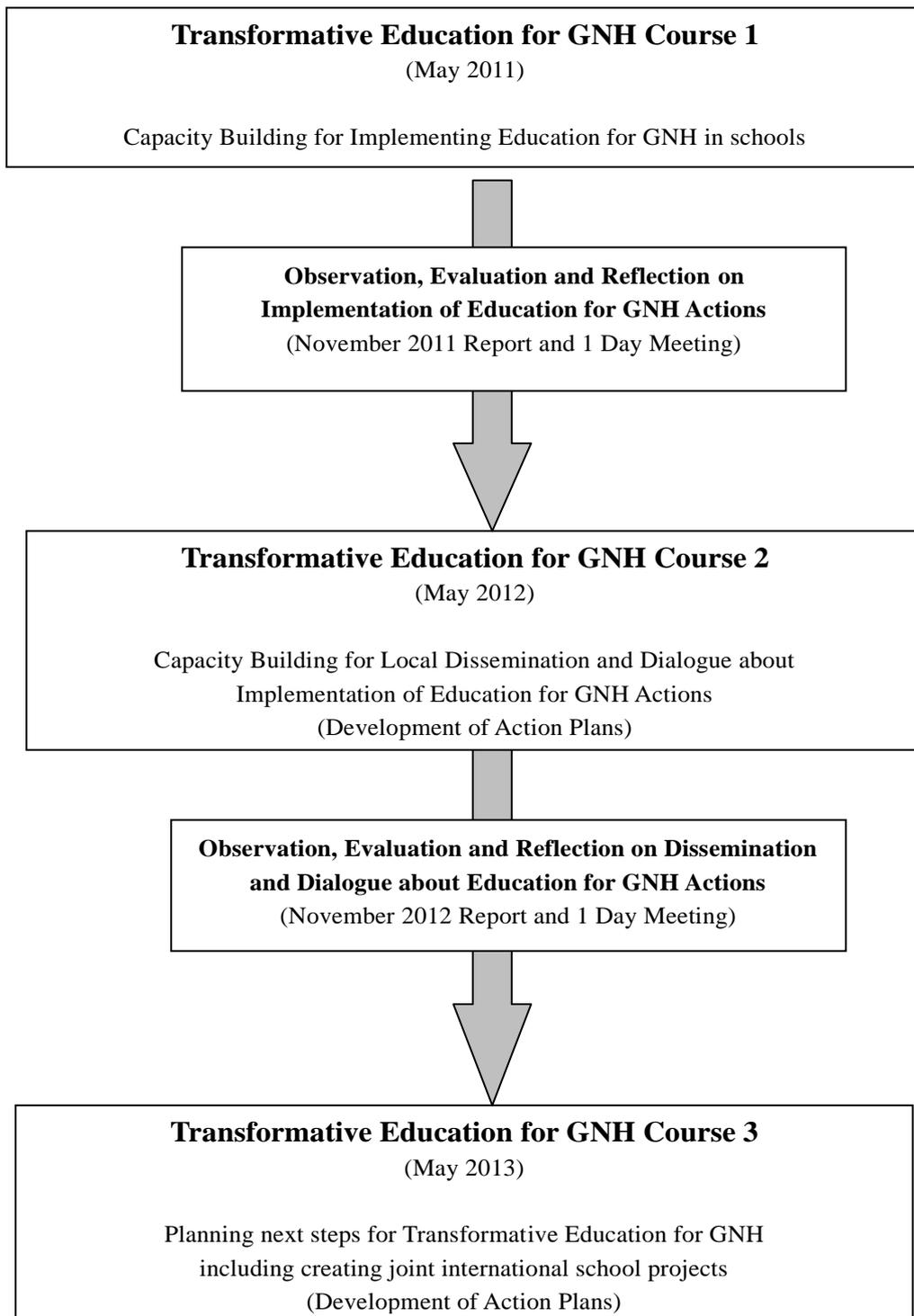
In May 2012 there will be a second *Leadership Training Course* with the same participants. This course will focus on capacity building for local dissemination and dialogue about transformative actions in schools for GNH. During the course action research, transformative pedagogy, media literacy and ICT skills will be built on in more depth.

After a further six months teachers will submit another mid-term report, followed by a one day meeting with the local coordinator to reflect and develop revised plans for the subsequent six months.

In May 2013 there will be a third *Leadership Training Course* to further develop Transformative Education for GNH. This course will be based on participants' experiences over the previous two years and their emergent needs. In addition, there will be a focus on international dissemination and dialogue about transformative actions in schools for GNH. As a result this could lead to the creation of joint international projects as part of a South-North Schools Partnership.

There will be a Project coordinator from both Finland and Bhutan. The coordinator from Finland will be involved in the development of *Leadership Training Course* content and materials with another trainer from Finland, as well as configuring the web-based learning environment (SUSNET). The coordinator from Bhutan will also give input for the training course, as well as recruit local trainers and course participants. In addition the Bhutan coordinator will (1) act as a mentor to teachers in the implementation of the Education for GNH action plans, (2) facilitate meetings between courses with teachers to reflect on their progress, (3) compile and evaluate the reports of teachers about their Education for GNH implementation, and (4) identify further capacity building needs. The project activities and timetable are summarized in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Transformative Education for GNH Project: Activities and Timetable

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Transformative Education for GNH Course 1
(May 2011)

Capacity Building for Implementing Education for GNH in schools

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**Observation, Evaluation and Reflection on
Implementation of Education for GNH Actions**
(November 2011 Report and 1 Day Meeting)

Transformative Education for GNH Course 2
(May 2012)

Capacity Building for Local Dissemination and Dialogue about
Implementation of Education for GNH Actions
(Development of Action Plans)

**Observation, Evaluation and Reflection on Dissemination
and Dialogue about Education for GNH Actions**
(November 2012 Report and 1 Day Meeting)

Transformative Education for GNH Course 3
(May 2013)

Planning next steps for Transformative Education for GNH
including creating joint international school projects
(Development of Action Plans)

The theoretical framework for a transformative pedagogy for GNH

Based on my previous research (Bedford 2009) I have constructed a theoretical framework for a transformative pedagogy for GNH. Transformative pedagogy will guide the teaching and learning processes of the *Leadership Training Course,* and hopefully impact the pedagogical practices of teachers after they return to their students in schools.

The theoretical framework consists of three parts: GNH values and principles, critical pedagogy theories, and transformative education for GNH, as shown in the Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Theoretical Framework for Transformative Pedagogy – Fostering Teacher Empowerment to Implement GNH.
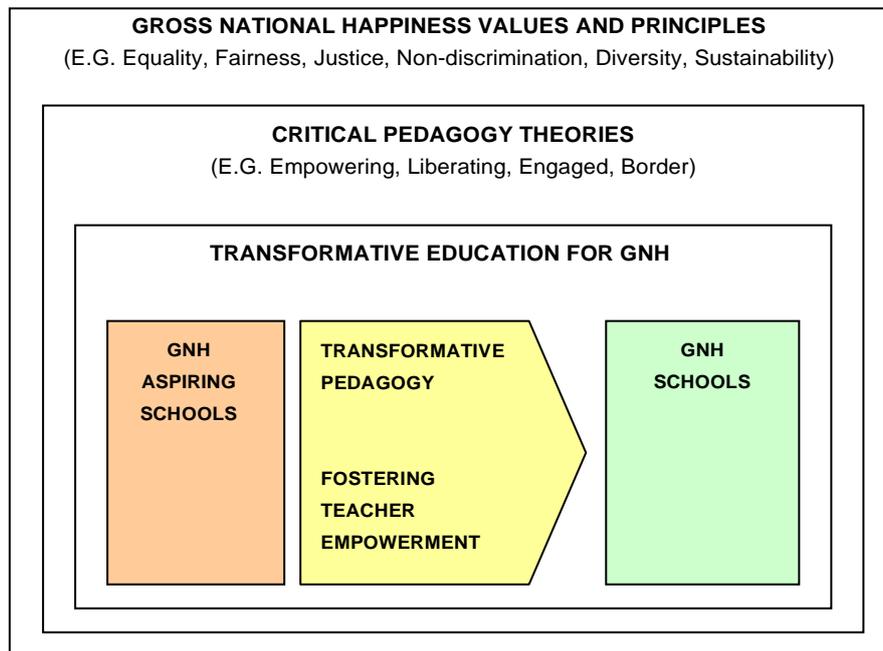
Ethics is central to transformative pedagogy, and the values and principles articulated by Karma Ura (2009) for GNH value education provide a starting point for an ethical foundation. Based on Karma Ura's work, CAPSD (2010) has produced a template for adapting the values and principles of GNH to school situations. The template includes an overview of the 9 domains of GNH with their respective multi-faceted values.

As can be seen in Figure 2, transformative pedagogy aims to foster teacher empowerment to transform school practices and structures and create GNH schools. Given the centrality of empowerment for school transformation I now discuss the concept further.

Teacher empowerment for transformation

I have defined in my prior work (Bedford 2009) the concepts of power and empowerment as follows:

– Power: the *drive*, *ability* and *possibility* of an individual or group to act on a problem of concern
– Empowerment: a process that increases the *drive*, *ability* and *possibility* of an individual or group to act on a problem of concern

The existence of all three components of power and empowerment, defined below, are important for transformation to occur. For example, without drive or possibility there will be no action, and without ability action will be ineffective.

1. Drive: motivation, determination, enthusiasm, and courage to act.
2. Ability: mental or physical capacity or skills to act.
3. Possibility: opportunities or chances to act.

Using an analogy from economics, power can be viewed as a stock, that is, a given amount of drive, ability and possibility at a particular point in time. On the other hand, empowerment can be viewed as a flow, meaning an increase or decrease in power over a given period of time. In this way, empowerment is an increase in power and disempowerment a decrease in power, as shown in the bathtub analogy in the Figure 4 below. The level of bath water represents the stock of power, water flowing in is empowerment and water flowing out through the plughole is disempowerment.

Figure 4: The relationship between power and empowerment

Tap = Empowerment

Water level = Power

Plug hole = Disempowerment
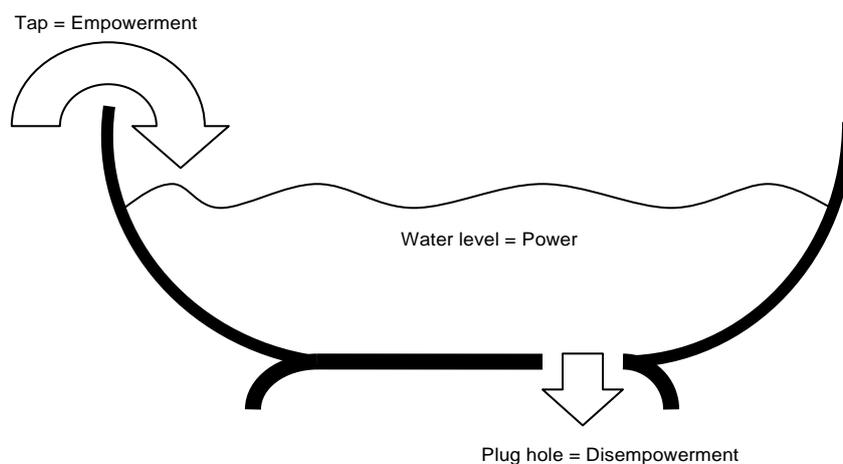
The distinction between stock and flow is important, because when considering transformation, it is not simply empowerment that is important, but rather power, or being sufficiently empowered (the level of bath water). The instrumental value of empowerment is agency that can give rise to transformative action. However, individual agency can be constrained by social structures which perpetuate the status quo.

My definitions of empowerment reflect my specific interest in the capability of teachers to exercise power (both individually and collectively) to transform schools. To reflect the instrumental value of empowerment, and the Transformative Education for GNH Project aims, three conceptual forms of empowerment that I have developed are relevant. *Latent empowerment*, is a feeling of having more power to act on a problem of concern. Latent empowerment recognises that the *Leadership Training Course* may lead to positive cognitive

and psychological changes, but not yet manifest in activism. In this sense, latent empowerment can be considered as feeling one has the potential to act.

Empowerment which leads to activism but where the desired transformation has not yet occurred, I call *active empowerment*. When empowerment leads to activism and the desired transformation is finally achieved, I call this *transformative empowerment,* which implies having sufficient power to achieve one's goals. Sen (1999) has a similar term to transformative empowerment that he calls *agency achievement,* "success in the pursuit of the totality of her considered goals and objectives" (p. 56). The distinction between these three types of empowerment is important, as it is possible that the *Leadership Training Course* could lead to just latent empowerment that does not translate into activism and school transformation. Teachers may experience different levels of agency to further the implementation of GNH in their schools. Identifying the barriers limiting, or preventing, actions or transformation may determine alternative efforts required to enable the teacher to realise transformative empowerment, which is the aim of the *Leadership Training Course*. The types of empowerment are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Three types of empowerment.

Empowerment type	Description
Latent empowerment	A feeling of having more drive, ability, and possibility to act individually and/or collectively on a problem of concern that has not yet led to action (activism)
Active empowerment	Having more drive, ability, and possibility to act individually and/or collectively on a problem of concern that has led to action (activism)
Transformative empowerment	Having more drive, ability, and possibility to act individually and/or collectively on a problem of concern that has led to action (activism) and the desired transformation

The transformative empowerment of teachers to collaboratively take actions to create GNH schools is the aim of the pedagogical approach for the *Leadership Training Course* and SUSNET. Such empowered teachers I call *transformative teachers*.

The qualities of a transformative teacher
Kincheloe (1993, pp. 201-203) describes the characteristics of a transformative teacher (which he chose to call a post-formal teacher). Firstly, such teachers are "inquiry oriented," and they cultivate research skills to explore problems that have been posed about life in and outside the classroom. Post-formal teachers have an awareness of the shaping of educational discourses, and the socio-historic construction of knowledge. They are also "dedicated to the cultivation of situated participations," by drawing upon the words, concerns, and experience of their students. This also involves an empathetic and engaged teaching approach that elicits participation from

students. Post-formal teachers have a concern with critical self- and social-reflection, and encourage dialogical situations that promote self-reflection. And significantly for this Education for GNH Project, post-formal teachers are "committed to action," and foster activism in their students.

Shor summarises four qualities of desocialised thinking associated with a transformative teacher. Firstly, *power awareness*, which refers to knowledge that society is made through the actions of contending forces and can be transformed. Secondly, *critical literacy*, which is concerned with going beneath surface meanings to understand root causes of societal problems and the ideologies that sustain them, as well as the consequences of actions, social processes, and discourses. Thirdly, *permanent desocialisation* is about questioning power and inequality in the status quo, and examining socialised values in consciousness and society which hold back democratic change. It includes acknowledging and rejecting regressive values, actions, and institutional practices reflecting, for example, different forms of discrimination. Fourthly, *self-education/organisation* is about developing critical thought and reflection as a basis for cooperative action, such as developing educational projects coordinated with political groups, voluntary associations, or social movements. (Shor 1992, pp. 129-130.)

Desocialised thinking emphasises an understanding of the socio-historical construction of society, and the processes whereby human actions (agency) reproduce social structures and relations, while also being affected by the very same relations. It implies that individuals are not just passive objects, but through empowerment can engage in actions that have an influence on societal structures. Desocialised thinking is the basis for seeing the world differently and producing agency for cooperative action to reject and transform processes and structures that are barriers to achieving for example GNH. As Shor (1992, p. 129) says, "human action makes society, and society is unfinished and can be transformed."

Post-formal thinking and transformative knowledge can be considered as the starting point for teacher agency for school interventions to produce active citizens working as empowered agents for personal and societal transformation. Such teachers possess an ability to understand the processes and structures that are barriers to achieving GNH and also the know-how, drive, and possibility to take effective action. As such, post-formal thinking and transformative knowledge constitute transformative empowerment, which is the aim of the transformative pedagogy I am constructing. I now discuss the foundations for such an empowering transformative pedagogy using critical pedagogy as a starting point.

Critical pedagogy as a framework for empowerment and social transformation
The aim of critical pedagogy is to develop awareness of societal problems that leads to empowerment and action to overcome problems such as inequality and injustice. Ethics is central to critical pedagogy and the starting point for constructing a pedagogy to foster the empowerment of teachers as transformative intellectuals to implement GNH. As previously mentioned, the ethical foundation for this Project's transformative pedagogy is based on the values and principles of GNH, such as those articulated by Ura (2009), e.g. equality, fairness, justice, non-discrimination, diversity, sustainability. These values are influenced by Buddhism,

but many are also shared by critical theories, including empowerment and promoting equitable practices and structures. A variety of names have been given to critical pedagogies including liberatory/liberation pedagogy (Freire & Shor 1987), engaged pedagogy (hooks 1994), border pedagogy (Giroux 1991), and empowering education (Shor 1992). These pedagogies all focus on critical awareness and action to transform society.

Critical educational theorists all share the view that education is not a neutral process but rather one that is always political (e.g., Freire 1970; Freire & Macedo 1987; Giroux 1997; Shor 1992). Furthermore the decisions that educators make are seen as negotiations over whose values, interests, and beliefs are validated (Shannon 1992).

Critical pedagogies have been developed and applied in different contexts with varied issues and aims (some broad and some more specific). These range from mainstream teacher education programmes in the North, for example to counter oppression and discrimination, to critical literacy programmes for the poor in the South, such as Freire's teaching of illiterate peasants. Freire's work to educate and improve the well-being of peasant farmers was carried out under a military dictatorship opposed to his work. This stands in stark contrast to Bhutan where the weight of the government is behind societal transformation and education for GNH. It is therefore apparent that not all of the ideas of critical pedagogy are relevant or applicable to this Project. Besides, critical pedagogy has to date been largely anthropocentric, whereas GNH has broader socio-economic, environmental, political and cultural dimensions.

Saavedra's (1996) research provides a relevant example of critical pedagogy. She facilitated a teachers' study group for two years to investigate how the six participants could "reconstruct classroom and school contexts by developing a more critical understanding of teaching and learning, and by recreating our roles as educators to deal with the influences that social and institutional policies have on our students" (p. 271). The critical pedagogical approach used collaboration, collective reflection, problem posing, and an examination of power relations. For Saavedra, teacher empowerment "lies in the possibility of examining the contexts in which their voices have been silenced and establishing their inclusion in the discussions of education and school reform" (p. 272). The outcome of the study demonstrated the empowerment and of the participants, and created a set of eight transformative conditions: (1) dialogic context, (2) identity and voice, (3) ownership and agency, (4) dissonance and conflict, (5) mediational events and demonstrations, (6) reflection, action and generation, (7) self-assessment and evaluation, and (8) reflective practice. The importance of teachers for the educational change process was stressed:

> If we wish to see educational change, we have to realize that those who are responsible for constructing the day-to-day interactions and mechanisms in our schools, namely teachers, must be entrusted to create that change. This can occur only if they are given ownership of their learning contexts in order to explore the development of knowledge and actions needed to transform schools. (Saavedra 1996, p. 276.)

The above discussion demonstrates the potential of critical pedagogy to promote teacher empowerment and school change. From this I go on to construct the initial pedagogical principles for the transformative pedagogy of the Transformative Education for GNH Project.

Initial critical pedagogical principles
The biggest influences on my ideas for constructing a transformative pedagogy come from the critical pedagogies of Paulo Freire (1970, 1973, 1994, 1998a, 1998b), as well as Henry Giroux (1991, 1992, 1997), and Ira Shor (1992) – the latter two have also been influenced by Freire's work.

Freire views education as a liberatory practice that is not only committed to individual empowerment and transformation, but also to the collective radical transformation of society. His educational approach focuses on issues and problems that are relevant to communities (what he calls *generative themes*), believing there is a strong connection between emotion and drive to take action. Therefore, learning activities should be situated in the life experiences of students and teachers.

Problem posing is the term Freire uses for his pedagogy in which the teacher (or animator) provides a framework for critical thinking, creativity, active participation, and experiential approaches to find solutions to problems. It involves a learning community engaged in cooperative inquiry to develop understanding of issues and act on a problem of concern such as the promotion of GNH. Dialogue is central to a learning community and as Freire says, "without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education" (1970, p. 73). A dialogical learning community is in contrast to the domesticating banking approach in which students passively absorb the sacred body of knowledge deposited in their heads by the teacher. The Educating for GNH Mandala (CAPSD 2010, p.33) captures this problem posing/banking approach dichotomy "Education is not the filling of a pail…It is the lighting of a life". Dialogical learning communities are based on mutual support to empower participants to act in ways that promote justice and equity. It is also a community that leads students to find their own voices, develop self-understanding and light up their lives.

Also central to Freire's pedagogy is *conscientisation*. At the heart of the conscientisation process is the development of critical understanding that results in critical action to overcome problems. Conscientisation is different to awareness raising in that the latter does not necessarily translate into action to change the world. Unlike conscientisation that is rooted in the problem posing approach, awareness raising can also be rooted in the banking approach when there is just transmission from an 'expert' to a passive audience. This is important for the implementation of GNH. Rather than listening to lectures about GNH, teachers need to be actively engaged in developing the capacity to implement GNH, and formulating their own plans for transforming their own practice and schools.

Freire (1973) describes different stages of conscientisation which leads to the development of *critical transitive consciousness*, which is characterised by

depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one's own findings and by openness to revision; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness of argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics; by receptivity to the new for reasons beyond mere novelty and by the good sense not to reject the old because it is old – by accepting what is valid in old and new . . . It corresponds to highly permeable, interrogative, restless and dialogical forms of life. (pp. 18-19.)

I would stress that a critical perspective of accepting what is valid in old and new, is especially important for Bhutan given the external influences of the foreign media and international organisations. That is why media literacy and economic literacy are important.

Conscientisation proceeds through a praxis of "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (Freire 1970, p. 107). In this praxis individuals develop a critical understanding of their reality (critical consciousness) that is understood to have the power to transform the world. Freire's praxis thus creates an inner power that enables individuals and groups to become activists to change the world. The praxis impacts on both ability and drive to act and transform. The development of critical consciousness thus goes hand in hand with empowerment and transformation.

Kuhn (2004) goes on to outline the basic steps by which learning and facts are to be brought together in terms of Freire's praxis:

Awareness of one's concrete… situation, understanding of the historical elements by which this situation has come to exist, awareness of the possibility that this situation may be changed, and by which means, and willingness to act to produce such change. Thus, conscientization is a process which utilizes the dialectic between reflection and action, leading to a radical rejection of one reality, and action proclaiming a new reality to take its place. (p. 9.)

These basic steps form the basis for transformative learning where conscientisation leads to activism to change society:

It so happens that to every understanding, sooner or later an action corresponds. Once man perceives a challenge, understands it, and recognizes the possibilities of response, he acts. The nature of that action corresponds to the nature of his understanding. Critical understanding leads to critical action. (Freire 1973, p. 44)

Giroux (1991, pp. 47-54) outlines principles for his border pedagogy for teachers as cultural workers and transformative intellectuals. He also argues that pedagogical practices should not only heighten the possibilities for critical consciousness but also transformative action. Giroux (1991) stresses the importance of dialogue, and therefore the rejection of the banking approach. He argues that education should recognise the socially constructed nature of knowledge claims and also pursue new forms of knowledge and culture. Giroux also calls for creating a language of critique and possibility that engages individuals in imagining a more just world and to struggle for it. Finally, Giroux argues that individuals need to develop a critically conscious voice that is connected to broader notions of solidarity, struggle and politics for a better world.

Like Freire, Giroux argues that education needs to be connected to critical democracy and foster critical ethical consciousness and transformative action for an equitable and socially just world. This is achieved through participatory learning communities engaged in a dialogical praxis of action and reflection directed at transforming society and improving well-being.

Ira Shor demonstrates both the theory and practice of critical pedagogy for empowerment, democracy and social justice. In addition to his desocialising principle previously mentioned, he proposes some other values (or principles) for his empowering pedagogy: participatory, affective, problem-posing, situated, multicultural, dialogic, democratic, researching, interdisciplinary, and activist (Shor 1992, p. 17) Shor's pedagogical principles, along with those of Freire and Giroux discussed above, provided the starting point for the development of a transformative pedagogy in my previous research (Bedford 2009). I further developed the transformative pedagogy based on (1) the emergent empowering principles of leadership training courses for teachers to promote educational equity, (2) the quality of empowerment of teachers after the courses to engage in activism and school transformation.

Principles of web-assisted transformative pedagogy
In this paper I have attempted to go one step further and modify the pedagogy to take into account the context of the Transformative Education for GNH Project. The resulting transformative pedagogy (see Figure 5) is characterised by the 7 principles which I describe briefly below.

1. Ethical Principle
Shared ethical principles (such as equality, fairness, justice, non-discrimination, sustainability and non-violence), bind together school communities and guide educational transformation for GNH. The ethical principles provide a framework to focus actions towards an improvement of school and societal well-being.

2. Conscientising Principle
Conscientisation is praxis involving the development of critical understanding as a basis for action to transform schools and society. The praxis includes (1) understanding the root causes of a problem, (2) recognising that the problem can be addressed and setting goals for change, and (3) developing the capacity to overcome the problem.

3. Activist Principle
The activist principle concerns the channelling of critical understanding into critical action to transform schools and society. It is a reflective practice where learning takes place in the process of making change which then informs further actions towards attaining one's goal.

4. Situated Principle
The situated principle refers to learning that is important and relevant to the life experiences of course participants. Situated learning enables participants to contextualise course content, and uses accessible language that is sensitive to participants' needs, backgrounds and prior knowledge. *Generative themes* are important to guide the direction and emphasis of the

learning. The situated principle also aims to ensure that the post-course action plans of participants will be grounded in each school context.

5. Diversity-affirming principle

This principle is concerned with the importance of valuing diversity in schools and society, which may be reflected in e.g. ethnic, gender, class, urban/rural differences. It also concerns the issue of education about and for whom? Diversity-affirming classrooms recognise the importance of learning from the varied life experiences of students, and valuing and respecting cultural differences. The curriculum should strive to be both a mirror for each student and a window into the lives of other students.

6. Researching Principle

In order to transform schools there is a need to connect the theory and practice of GNH. Action research provides an approach for the design, implementation and refinement of plans to create GNH schools.

7. Participatory Principle

The participatory principle is about teaching and learning that is experiential, dialogical, democratic and inquiry-based. Experiential learning is inherently participatory as it involves constructing knowledge and gaining skills from direct experiences. Dialogical teaching and learning is characterised by active questioning and an on-going exchange of ideas between the teacher and student who become jointly responsible for the learning process. As such it is a democratic process in which there is shared power and participants have a chance to express ideas. Inquiry-based learning sees the role of the teacher as not an expert but rather as an animator facilitating a participatory inquiry. A participatory approach is essential for the implementation of GNH. Teachers need to feel that they are valued and have some ownership and say in the process.

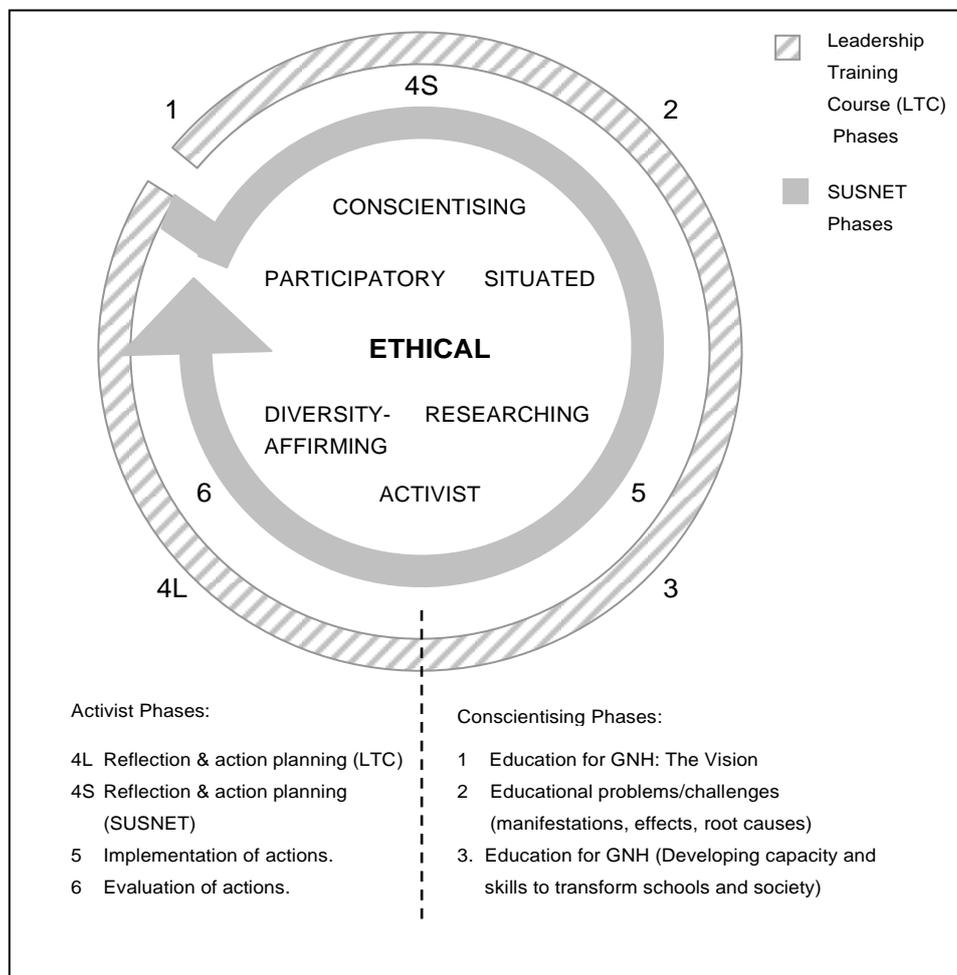**Phases of web-assisted transformative pedagogy**

As the aim of the pedagogy that I have constructed is to foster the transformative empowerment of teachers that leads to activism and school transformation, I call it *transformative pedagogy*. After the *Leadership Training Course* the participants form an on-line learning community called SUSNET. This community is designed to continue the learning experiences and dialogue started during the course, and provide support and resources for the actions of teachers in their schools to implement GNH. Taking into consideration the role of SUSNET after the course, I call the pedagogical approach *web-assisted transformative pedagogy (WATP)*.

In Figure 5, the conscientising and activist principles describe six sequential and interrelated phases of the web-assisted transformative pedagogy, which together make a spiralling learning cycle. The shaded circular area shows Phases 1 to 4L which take place during the *Leadership Training Course*. The focus of Phases 1 to 3 is conscientising. Phase 1 is about articulating and understanding the vision of education for GNH. Phase 2 is about understanding the problems

and challenges for education in Bhutan, and in particular the manifestations, effects and causes of problems faced. This provides the overall context for educational change. Phase 3 is about the role education can play in promoting GNH and developing capacity and skills to transform schools and society. Phase 4L is activist and involves reflection and action planning.

The filled circular area represents the Phases after the course beginning with Phase 4S i.e. further reflection and action to refine plans. This is followed by Phases 5 and the implementation of action plans. Phase 6 takes place six months after the course, and teachers carry out an evaluation of their actions, and meet with their local coordinator to reflect and develop revised action plans for the subsequent 6 months. Further cycles of phases 4S to 6 then follow until the next *Leadership Training Course*.

Figure 5: The principles and phases of web-assisted transformative pedagogy (WATP)

Activist Phases:

4L Reflection & action planning (LTC)
4S Reflection & action planning
     (SUSNET)
5   Implementation of actions.
6   Evaluation of actions.

Conscientising Phases:

1 Education for GNH: The Vision
2 Educational problems/challenges
    (manifestations, effects, root causes)
3. Education for GNH (Developing capacity and
    skills to transform schools and society)

Conclusion

Bhutan has set out on a unique development path that has socio-economical, environmental, political and cultural pillars. In 1972, former King Jigme Singye Wangchuck proclaimed Gross National Happiness (GHN) as the guiding goal for Bhutan's development. Since then the philosophy and methodology of GNH have been further refined by researchers at the Center for Bhutan Studies. There have also been 5 international GNH conferences, and global interest in GNH has increased in recent years. Education for GNH has now become a national priority for the government of Bhutan.

In this paper I have made a first attempt to construct a pedagogical and methodological approach for a Transformative Education for GNH Project. The project places teachers at the centre of the school change process. Teacher empowerment is essential for educational transformation and therefore I have used critical theories and pedagogies as the starting point for the methodological and theoretical framework. These theories focus on developing critical awareness and the implementation of plans to transform schools and society (e.g. along GNH lines), guided by the praxis of action research.

Although critical theories have their roots in the West, I am optimistic, for various reasons that they can be adapted and applied to Bhutan's GNH challenge. Firstly, the ethical principles and values of critical pedagogy and GNH share many values, such as those contained in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Secondly, the participatory, situated and diversity-affirming principles of transformative pedagogy, make it possible to infuse local values, e.g. principles of Buddhism. Thirdly, Socially Engaged Buddhism in both Eastern and Western contexts integrates the practice of Buddhism with social action for a just and sustainable world (see International Network of Engaged Buddhists[3]).

Fourthly examples of action research in Bhutan have been published, though they have a more technical/practical orientation rather than critical (e.g. Dukpa 2003; Gajmer & Maxwell 2009; Maxwell 2003; Namgyel 2005[4]). Fifthly, research has pointed to similarities between key Buddhist values and basic principles of action research (Winter 2003). Chuaprapisilip (1997) argues that Buddhist notions of insight and mindfulness can help clarify the reflection phase in the action research cycle, and that the concept of dependent origination embodies the entire action research cycle. Furthermore, Hattam (2004) offers a comparison of critical theory with socially-engaged Buddhism, which he argues are both concerned with awakening and liberating society. His work culminates in an attempt to develop a Buddhist-inspired critical theory for social change, and this could eventually be one of the outcomes of this Project.

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[3] International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB): http://www.inebnetwork.org/

[4] Each of these 4 publications is available on-line via the Centre for Educational Research and Development at Paro College of Education website: http://www.pce.edu.bt/cerd/Rabsel%20Volume.html

Bhutan's chosen vision and path is unprecedented, and one that the rest of the world can learn from. GNH is of course not without its limitations and imperfections both in theory and practice, that is why a critical perspective is important. Also the scale of the task to implement GNH is formidable. Education has a key role to play, but it takes more than education to transform society. There is a need for persistence, mobilisation of support and the further development of the capacity for transformative action.

Author

Dr. Timothy Bedford was born in England and studied Economics at Cambridge University, and Education at Leicester University. He received his doctoral degree, which focused on action research to promote educational equity through teacher empowerment, from Oulu University in Finland. He has worked in teacher education, and high schools teaching economics and Theory of Knowledge in England, Kenya, Japan and Finland, and has also been involved in many international curriculum development and teacher education projects. He has been keenly following the developments of GNH, and introducing it to his past and present economics students in Finland. Through the creation of a South-North Schools Partnership for Global Sustainability he hopes to foster an international GNH/Sustainable Development dialogue.

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