



Burnished Ornamentalism: Making Sense of History, Iconography and the Visual Cultural Practices of Postcolonial Elite Schools in Globalizing Circumstances

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12:45 – 14:00

Chair: Dr Liz Jackson



Abstract:

This paper addresses the management and conservation of histories (“burnished ornamentalism”) in three school sites: in Barbados, India and Singapore. These schools form part of a 5-year, 9-country study of postcolonial elite schools in globalizing circumstances - a flash point of articulation between these schools and profound change. The presentation turns on this fundamental fact: that these schools, which are the products of societies marked historically by colonial and imperial encounters, are now driven forward by new energies associated with marketization, neoliberalism and globalization as these countries lurch forward unevenly towards a postdevelopmental era. This turn towards neoliberal globalization has precipitated radically new needs, interests, desires, capacities and competitive logics among the middle class and upwardly-mobile young and their parents in each of these societies that then press powerfully onto these elite schools and school anthems, flags, emblems, banners and rituals of assembly, formal dress and decorum. All of this is taking place in the glow of digitalization as these schools move online locating themselves in photo and video-sharing websites such as YouTube, Facebook and Flickr as well as websites that each individual school is creating to consecrate school heritage. After offering a vignette that illustrates the new circumstances for postcolonial elite schools as they respond to global forces, I will discuss the changing context that heightens the importance of these schools’ investment in the burnishing of school image and iconography in the transnational educational market.

About the speaker:

Cameron McCarthy is Communication Scholar and University Scholar in the Department of Educational Policy, Leadership and Organization (EPOL) and in the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Professor McCarthy teaches courses in globalization studies, postcolonialism, mass communications theory and cultural studies. He has published widely on topics related to globalization, canon formation, race and the class conquest of the city, postcolonialism, problems with neoMarxist writings on race and education, institutional support for teaching, and school ritual and adolescent identities in journals such as Harvard Educational Review, Oxford Review of Education, The British Journal of the Sociology of Education, The European Journal of Cultural Studies and Education, Contemporary Sociology, Communications Inquiry, Cultural Studies, Discourse among many others. Professor McCarthy is currently one of the lead-investigators of the “Elite Schools in Globalizing Circumstances” global ethnography study of youth and education in nine countries and 5 continents: Australia, Africa, India, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean.



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