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Legitimizing indigenous knowledge in Zimbabwe: A theoretical analysis of postcolonial school knowledge and its colonial legacy

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Abstract

This article is a theoretical discussion on the social construction of knowledge in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe. It examines effects of hegemonic knowledge constructions and how they may be de-legitimated through incorporating indigenous knowledge in postcolonial school curricular. The article questions the importance attached to Euro-centric school knowledge and the devaluation of indigenous knowledge in postcolonial states. It further argues that indigenous knowledge as informal knowledge plays a major role in society and should be formalized in educational institutions to constitute a transformative and inclusive educational system. The article proposes hybridization of knowledge to give voice to the formerly marginalized in school curricular in Zimbabwe. It also proposes that knowledge as a historical, cultural, social, spiritual and ideological creation should be a product of collaborated efforts from all possible stakeholders to foster social development and self-confidence in individuals.

Introduction

The education systems in postcolonial states in Africa appear not to have made much progress in shedding previously reified “modern” colonial knowledge to define and determine academic knowledge relevant for African societies and economies. Curricular in schools are deeply seated in the assumption that Euro-centric knowledge is superior to indigenous African knowledge, and this assumption is rife and regarded as “truth.” The assumption has promoted the displacement and silencing of other belief and knowledge systems, which have largely been marginalized. In the process schooling, in its current structure, tends to impose cultural essentialism (Bhabha, 1990) and reproduce certain ways of viewing the world in the subordinate and marginalized groups. The reproduction of the culture of the dominant class in schools has a hegemonic effect that reinforces the fact that educational systems all over the world are not value-free and neutral (Shizha, 2005). Schooling reproduces the cultural capital and worldview of the dominant social class in society.

In postcolonial states, like Zimbabwe, the reification of Euro-centric knowledge, which promotes the "superiority" of Western knowledge, is still perpetuated by the education system and schooling practices that negate ideals on cross-cultural education

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and the role of indigenous knowledge in students' school experiences. Formal education (organized and institutionalized learning such as in schools and colleges) in Zimbabwe continues to be Euro-centric in outlook and academic in orientation, reflecting Western industrial and scientific cultures rather than the cultures of learners and their teachers. Schooling, curriculum content, teaching and learning styles run contrary to socio-cultural realities that students bring to the school site. The community's cultural knowledge constitutes the informal learning that children experience in their everyday lives, which is discounted as irrelevant for schooling. Education in postcolonial Zimbabwe does very little to incorporate the life-worlds and lived experiences of students. It denies and prevents these students from actively engaging and participating in knowledge production. Arguably, postcolonial education, in most cases redefines and reproduces hegemonic structures of western-defined knowledge (Shizha, 2005).

The social construction of indigenous knowledge

In light of new and emerging conceptions of learning in the literature, the educational community has begun to re-examine the concept "knowledge" and how it is constructed (Lauzon, 1999). The emergence of new conceptions of learning, for the most part, can be attributed to the growth of constructivism. Essentially, this philosophical position argues that while learners may experience reality directly, the meaning of that reality is constructed; they construct and make sense of that reality themselves. Bednar *et al.* (1991) capture the essence of this philosophical position when they write that:

“Learning is a constructivist process in which the learner is building on internal representation of knowledge, a personal interpretation of experience. This representation is constantly open to change, its structure and linkages forming the foundation to which other knowledge structures are appended. Learning is an active process in which meaning is developed on the basis of experience. This view of knowledge does not necessarily deny the existence of the real world, and agrees that reality places constraints on the concepts that are knowable, but contends that all we know of the world are human interpretations of our experience of the world. Conceptual growth comes from our internal representations in response to these perspectives as well as through cumulative experience.” (as cited in Lauzon, 1999), p. 262-263)

From a constructivist perspective, knowledge arises from people's social, cultural and historical experiences. No knowledge is neutral, objective, absolute or value-free. It is embedded in people's cultural, social and political lives, and flows from ideological assumptions shaped by such factors as gender, class, ethnicity, language and religion (Dei, 1996). People's ways of thinking and knowing are rooted in their indigenous lives. It is knowledge that is not pre-specified but a product of experiences that are situated in people's real world context.

Indigenous perspectives on learning postulate that learning environments are varied and situational, thus acknowledging the existence of multiple perspectives on knowledge and socio-cultural reality. According to Lauzon (1999), this explicitly acknowledges that values inform all knowledge construction and that, from a

constructivist perspective, all knowledge is socially constructed. Thus, indigenous knowledge in Zimbabwe and other postcolonial states is not “primitive” or “backward” as once portrayed in Western philosophical thought. These are historical and social constructions that stem from peoples' experiences rather than being *Objects* in the margins in European experiences (Asante, 2001). In Zimbabwe, as in other parts of the world, indigenous knowledge has been marginalized since colonialism when it was “discounted as invalid and irrelevant in contemporary Africa” (Shizha, 2005, p. 66). While indigenous knowledge is regarded as belonging to pre-modernity or traditional societies, Western science, which defines Western knowledge constructs, is viewed as embedded in modernity, an enlightenment philosophy that purports that the present is discontinuous with the past, that through a process of social and cultural change (either through improvement, that is, progress, or through decline) life in the present is fundamentally different from life in the past (Hooker, 1996).

Indigenous knowledge does not exist in a social vacuum, but in social, historical and cultural contexts. Semali and Kincheloe (1999) argue that as a body of knowledge they belong to a community where access to this body of knowledge is gained through contact with that community. Dialogue and collaboration are methods in the process of knowledge production. In order to acquire knowledge, a learner must become directly and actively involved or socially participate in a community. Learning from this perspective is a process of social interaction that takes place within a framework of participation whereby the learner acquires the necessary skills, tools, knowledge, beliefs and values to actively participate in the community (Lauzon, 1999). Learning is thus strongly linked to the survival of the family and the community. However, the problem of defining indigenous knowledge and what it means to millions of indigenous people of the world is central to postmodern and postcolonial debates. Central to the discourse are the polemics of the origins of knowledge, the manner in which it is produced, archived, retrieved and distributed throughout the academy. Indigenous knowledge and its role in social development or change is seen as ambiguous and most scholars and analysts are not sure what it means or entails. Chikako (2001), however, defines indigenous knowledge as “common knowledge shared by a community...has social, cultural, political and economic significance” (p. 262). Kirkness (1998), discussing Canadian Native people's traditional education, acknowledges that:

“From the scant knowledge that survived the many years of colonialism, we do know that our ancestors had evolved their own form of education. It was an education in which the community and the natural environment were the classroom, and the land was regarded as the mother of the people. Mothers of the community were the teachers, and each adult was responsible for ensuring that the child learned how to live a good life.” (p. 10)

Discussing the importance of the community and the natural environment, Mungazi (1996) and Mararike (1999) posit that among indigenous people in Zimbabwe, knowledge and social reality are constructed around people's everyday life thus contributing to holistic and interconnected experiences. Therefore, indigenous epistemology is a representation of the local people's life constructed by the people and controlled by the people themselves through informal and non-formal learning situations.

It is a set of representations of constructed local realities, indigenous Zimbabweans' social, cultural and spiritual realities, which determine people's social being, thinking, behavior and connectedness. Indigenous knowledge gives people the power to control their lives and establish a relationship and connectedness with their social, spiritual and physical environment. It gives meaning to people's realities with respect to where they came from, where they are and where they are going (Chikako, 2001). Indigenous knowledge, therefore, is a social construct that evolves out of the peoples' social world and cultural experiences. The knowledge is a representation of reality as constructed and experienced by indigenous Zimbabweans in their everyday lives.

The colonial construction of Western knowledge as “academic knowledge”

Kelly and Altbach (1984) describe colonization as a process whereby one nation or territory takes control of another nation or territory either through the use of force or by acquisition. In Africa, the misguided colonizer wrongly perceived colonization as a process for and means of bringing modernity to societies considered to be “backward” and living in the “dark ages.” Colonization stripped the colonized of their indigenous learning structures and knowledge constructs and forced them to use knowledge constructs and learning structures of the colonizer. All this was done in the name of “modernity” and “enlightenment.” Concerning modernity, Jary and Jary (2000) state that, “... in one of its senses 'modernity' is seen as identified with a belief in rationality and the triumph of truth and science” (p. 392). Seidman (1994) adds:

“At the heart of the modern West is the culture of the Enlightenment. Assumptions regarding the unity of humanity, the individual as the creative force of society and history, the superiority of the west, the idea of science as Truth, and the belief in social progress, have been fundamental to Europe and the United States.” (p.1)

The Enlightenment may, in principle, celebrate individualism and diversity; in practice, it is repressive. For example, the idea of social progress has been used to justify the destruction of local traditions and communities or to colonize non-Western people who were defined as backward or primitive. In this regard, through “modernity” the colonizers sought to assimilate the colonized into the foreign culture of the colonizer. According to Kelly and Altbach (1984), assimilation forced those who were colonized through cultural domination to conform to the cultures and traditions of the colonizers. The followers of Enlightenment philosophy used the school system and its “objective” and “rational” Western scientific knowledge to move forward their cultural and imperial agenda which was justified as scientific progress. The claim that Western science was objective truth silenced local or indigenous knowledge and the social experiences that the knowledge expressed. The knowledge and experiences of the indigenous people were described as non-scientific, irrational and inappropriate. In this regard, Seidman (1998) concludes:

“In short, the chief ideas of the Enlightenment, the malleability of humans, the doctrine of social progress, the unity of humanity, and the truth of science, are

viewed as part of the project of legislating order, controlling the unruly, labeling deviant those who differ or who do not conform to conventional norms of health, fitness, beauty, and virtue.” (p.314)

The agenda derived from modernity, for Western societies, was to bring “light,” “civility,” “rationality,” and “social progress” to non-Western societies. Curiously, colonialism was often justified in the name of Western humanism. These notions, embedded in colonial and imperial adventures, and defined as modernity, were a ruthless, relentless drive to wipe out all “chaos,” “ambiguity,” ambivalence, difference, and “uncertainty” from the African face. As the heartland of Western humanism, reason, and civilization, Europe was said to have its duty to spread enlightenment and progress to the rest of humanity. According to Bauman (1991),

“The typical modern practice, the substance of modern politics, of modern intellect, of modern life, is the effort to exterminate ambivalence: an effort to define precisely - and to suppress or eliminate everything that could not or would not be precisely defined.” (as cited in Seidman, 1998, p.314)

This spirit of control and intolerance characterized the modern state as it was (is?) perceived and defined by the colonizers. Bauman argues that the true spirit of enlightenment revolves around the quest for control and certitude. It is unfortunate that metropole/ colonial states, in their quest to control under-valued and marginalized local indigenous knowledge as unscientific and irrational, “replaced” it with Euro-centric knowledge for the purpose of “civilizing” the Africans. Euro-centric knowledge was viewed as the vehicle for social change, from an “irrational” and “primitive” society to a “modern” society.

Euro-centric knowledge was embedded in the myth of knowledge universalism. Western scientific knowledge, produced, universalized and exported to non-Western societies, was viewed as a vehicle for social change. It was regarded as a benchmark by which the production of non-Western civilization was measured and knowledge defined and authenticated. This is how the myths on which Western ideas and thought are constructed and reframed as “global knowledge.” In the process, however, Western cultural forms and realities, created and perceived as a mark of progress, induce historical, cultural, social and political discontinuity amongst indigenous people. Organized cultural, political, religious and economic institutions were disrupted. Recognized ways of understanding the world and realities were ignored and a *de facto* legitimization of Western views, which distort indigenous lives, was imposed on local people. In other words, an adequate understanding of the reality *sui generis* of the indigenous society, which required an inquiry into the manner in which life and reality were constructed, was not sought.

Levine (1996) observes that “modern” science was used as an instrument of colonialism to universalize Western knowledge and in turn marginalize local knowledge frames and constructs that had existed for centuries. By “modern” science, I mean the valorization and romanticization of Western thinking which is viewed as rational and logical as opposed to other forms of epistemological consciousness such as indigenous thought. Western science is a Euro-centric social reality, lived social relations, and a

socio-cultural and political construction. "Modern" science should be viewed as the production and reproduction of the Western life, as a reflection of its social and cultural imagination.

Semali and Kincheloe (1999) and Shiva (1997) argue that modern science was used to produce "universal histories", define "civilization" and determine "reality." The net effect was the legitimization of Western ways of perceiving colonial life while concurrently delegitimizing the local indigenous social realities. This misrecognition of the *Other's* reality was hegemonic and imperialistic as it operated to characterize indigenous knowledge as inadequate and inferior. Giddens (1990) describes imposed knowledge as "disembedding... 'the lifting out' of social relations from the social context of interaction..." (p. 21). The process of knowledge validation and truth claims was not considered in relation to the historical setting and cultural situated-ness of indigenous people. The existence of Euro-centric knowledge and subjugated indigenous knowledge in Zimbabwe was [is] what Stoler (2000) describes as "two nations inside a society that will conceive itself in binary terms" (p. 74). Unfortunately, for those who sought to be assimilated into the Western culture, Euro-centric knowledge was treated and mystified as *sui generis* which could not be challenged while indigenous knowledge was viewed as taboo and a falsification not worthy of academic placement and enterprise.

Colonial Western science promoted a hierarchical and linear form of knowledge that dismissed other forms of knowledge (Shiva, 1997; Desai, 2001). The process of knowledge creation and questions concerning cultural assumptions and appropriateness in the use of knowledge were not deemed important. It was an all-encompassing program that was meant to disadvantage indigenous people by decimating their identity and psychologically displacing and severing them from their ancestral habitus. Their lives were penetrated by the ghostly presence of distant influences. According to Macedo, colonial and imperial knowledge "exposed the fault lines of modernity grand narratives" (as cited in Semali and Kincheloe, 1999, p. xi). It positioned the indigenous people on the margins, where as subordinated cultural beings they struggled to make sense and understand themselves in relation to the imposed social environment bereft of their organized folk knowledge and cultural history. They were simultaneously ejected from identity-providing social contexts and confined to an alternative cultural world that was in confrontation and conflict with their respective definitions of reality.

The definitions and constructions of knowledge that were legitimized in Western philosophy and assumptions were key elements in a strategy that systematically led to social and political disempowerment and domination of the local people. Colonialism, and its knowledge constructs, was therefore a cultural invasion that imposed the cultural capital of the colonizer on the colonized. The invaders penetrated the cultural context of indigenous Zimbabweans, disdainful of the latter's potentialities; the colonizers imposed their own worldviews upon the invaded and inhibited the latter's creativity by curbing their self and cultural expression. Thus, using their cultural capital, the colonizers imposed, sanctioned and controlled knowledge production and dissemination.

Postcolonial knowledge as a legacy of Euro-centric knowledge

The determination of what counts as school knowledge, policies and decisions on what is to be taught and to whom it is to be taught is the prerogative of the State in Zimbabwe.

The State controls the education enterprise and decides how it should be pursued. Postcolonial education is still largely based on educational structures imposed during the colonial era. The education system perpetuates a colonial legacy that continues to define school knowledge as a Western, empirically derived rational science. In addition, Western constructs and frames of knowledge are still dominant in school curricular and classroom practice at all educational levels. The importation of textbooks from Western publishers and the inclusion of literature that portrays life in Britain foster a dependence on alien definitions of knowledge. Postcolonial writers, such as wa Thiong'o (1986) have criticized postcolonial knowledge, saying that:

“Education, far from giving people the confidence in their ability and capacity to overcome obstacles or to become masters of the laws governing external nature as human beings, tends to make them feel their inadequacies, their weakness, and their capacities in the face of reality and their inability to do anything about the conditions governing their lives.” (p.56)

Western culture, colonial and postcolonial curriculum, and pedagogical practices are deeply implicated in each other and continue to render formerly colonized, marginalized and repressed indigenous voices partially, and in some cases, totally silent. School knowledge continues to imprison the voices of the “voiceless” that are not actively involved in decisions affecting the schooling of their sons and daughters. The language of scientific investigation, English, which is also the medium of instruction in the delivery of the curriculum in Zimbabwe, makes the actions, feelings, attitudes and beliefs of the dominated culturally invisible. Writing on culture in educational institutions, Erickson (1997) observes that:

“Differences in invisible culture can be troublesome in circumstances of intergroup [*interknowledge*] conflict. The difficulty lies in our inability to recognize others’ differences in ways of acting as cultural rather than personal. We tend to naturalize other people’s behaviors and blame them - attributing intentions, judging competence - without realizing that we are experiencing culture rather than nature. Formal organizations and institutions, such as schools become collection sites for invisible cultural [*knowledge*] differences.” (as cited in Desai, 2001, p.62)

Academics, teachers and policy makers in Zimbabwe have a challenging role in turning educational sites into cultural centers that accommodate inter- and multi-cultural sensibilities. Multi-cultural and multi-focal methods, if used to define and construct what we know and how we know, will enable academics, teachers and students to use a variety of perspectives to invigorate discussion and excite their critical imagination (hooks, 1994). Changes in the school curriculum and the incorporation of different cultural perspectives in Zimbabwe make it crucial that students and teachers learn to enter the school and classroom “whole” rather than as “disembodied spirit[s]” (hooks, 1994, p.114). The school and the classroom become dynamic cultural spaces where transformation in social relations is concretely actualized and the false dichotomy between the world outside and the inside world of the academy disappears. Zimbabwean

teachers and students who are able to transform themselves are likely to be capable of transforming Zimbabwean society. This self and social transformation requires teachers, students and policy makers who are critical thinkers and actors. Critical consciousness is fostered through exposure to different perspectives, not through the cultivation of tunnel vision. Through critical consciousness, knowledge and critical thought engaged within the classroom should inform our habits of being and ways of living in a cross-cultural Zimbabwean society.

School knowledge in Zimbabwe has been and is still a colonial construct that undervalues the importance of local worldviews. It is Euro-centric and a result of the so-called modernity that was initiated by colonial hegemony. Euro-centric Western knowledge was reified to the extent that indigenous scholars accepted it without questioning its legitimacy. It was accepted as a natural and significant “productive” process of giving meaning to our “new” world experiences. The reification of this knowledge in colonial Zimbabwe led to the marginalization, social and political exclusion of indigenous knowledge in school discourse by excluding the latter from the science curriculum and from official educational policy decisions.

One ramification of continued reification of Euro-centric knowledge in Zimbabwe and all over the world is the myth that it is universal knowledge that permeates the everyday lives of all people. The myth is detrimental to positive social change because indigenous people in Zimbabwe and other postcolonial states find themselves being defined from the worldview of *others* who do not share their social and cultural world. Social development, within a group, should be viewed as a product of human experiences that occurs within a particular socio-cultural milieu. It derives from people’s everyday activities, how they define their social existence and how they define their future. Social change comes from the interrelatedness of existing knowledge constructs and people’s experiences and how people utilize their knowledge. Freire and Faundez (1989) argue that indigenous knowledge is a rich basis for any justice-related attempt to bring about social change. Thus, indigenous knowledge in Zimbabwe should be brought to the fore of social change and development in postcolonial societies.

Knowledge hybridization: legitimizing knowledges

Western and indigenous knowledge in Zimbabwe are in a state of continuous flux and contestation resulting from teachers’ perceptions of the concept of “science”. Binary opposition between the two forms of knowledge seems to allocate power to the cultural meanings associated with Western knowledge and these cultural meanings are perceived as school or academic knowledge. Policy makers and teachers in Zimbabwe do not give equal respect to Western and indigenous forms of knowledge. The two forms of knowledge do not represent equal values and are not treated equally. The first form is considered superior while the latter is defined as derivative, undesirable, and subordinate. Seidman (1998) argues that by relying on such hierarchical oppositions, Western thinkers have sought to identify an order of truth and reality that could function as an authoritative basis for judging truth/falsity, knowledge/ideology, reality/illusion, or right/wrong. Knowledge construction in Zimbabwe and other postcolonial states should therefore search to demystify Western thought and exert considerable critical effort towards undermining the hierarchical dualities that occupy a supreme place in Western culture.

Rescripting and demythologizing colonial knowledge entails debunking the same knowledge and its associated worldview. It means deconstructing and debunking Western knowledge which is regarded as the most valid and legitimate worldview for effective and meaningful social change in Zimbabwe.

Although at a theoretical level, binaries tend to exist between indigenous knowledge and Western science, an understanding of the importance of indigenous knowledge in school curricular cannot be achieved through these reductionist binaries (Garcia Canclini, 1995). A closer look at the Zimbabwean society indicates that current knowledge constructs are not entirely Western, neither are they totally indigenous. There has been cross-cultural interchange between the two for more than a century since colonization. A hybrid of Western and indigenous knowledge has culminated in a new hybrid of knowledge. Knowledge hybridization is based on the notion that knowledge globalization and universalization are social and cultural distortions and myths. Knowledge globalization and universalization imply similarities in bodies of world knowledge that can be found in all global spaces and societies. The view distances itself from the observation that each society has its own unique body of knowledge embedded in its history, culture and space. What has emerged in many societies, including Zimbabwe, is a hybrid of knowledge emanating from cross-cultural movements within and without national borders. Knowledge universalism is the illegitimate projection of Western values and power onto other global cultures. Gray (1997) states, "Universalism is actually a case of the particular disguising itself - *masquerading* - as the universal" (as cited in Tomlinson, 1999, p. 67). Knowledge hybridization seeks to demystify, 'demythologize' and deconstruct knowledge universalism and globalization. It is both an outcome and a relational process between forms of knowledge whereby indigenous and Western knowledges condition one another. By virtue of the continued existence of indigenous knowledge, although marginalized, policy makers or academics in Zimbabwe cannot ignore the presence of local knowledge in the social milieu and social spaces they occupy.

The social world is fragmented into a multitude of communities, cultural traditions, and cultural modernity, all of which contribute to relevant knowledge constructs. Postcolonial Zimbabwe is a nation cut into the rural and urban binary, which are not completely detached from each other. Placing knowledge hybridization in this context takes cognizance of the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic social structure of contemporary Zimbabwe and other postcolonial states. The co-existence of rural cultural traditions and urban cultural modernity creates a fertile space for a hybrid of knowledge. Thus, the principle of knowledge hybridization and pluralism runs against hegemonic practices, cultural imperialism, imposed Western values and cultural homogenization. It recognizes that there may be some common underlying conditions of existence irrespective of particularities, and that there may be consensual values and understanding constructed in respect of this commonality (Tomlinson, 1999). The state in Zimbabwe, through policy makers, academics, and teachers should not disqualify some types of knowledge and valorize others by establishing a hierarchy of knowledge. The hierarchy subordinates indigenous ways of knowing with the more general and abstract ("modern" Euro-centric) science situated at the top (Foucault, 1980).

The "structural duality" (Garcia Canclini, 1995) in urban and rural cultural versions, noted earlier on in Zimbabwe, strengthens the argument for cultural/knowledge

hybridization. The duality creates a knowledge intersection between indigenous and Western knowledge made possible by creating a space for multiple forms of knowledge. Multiple forms of knowledge emanate from recognizing and realizing that knowledge is not an absolute social phenomenon and that no knowledge construct is superior to the other. There is no globally standardized and structured knowledge. Instead the knowledge that exists in the world is perspectival, cultural and relative to the world communities and the users of the knowledge. Therefore in Zimbabwe, educational policy makers, academics, and teachers are the key agents in knowledge transformation, validation, and legitimization and are responsible for its dissemination and implementation in educational institutions. These agents' attitudes towards knowledge definitions play a vital role in knowledge harmonization and hybridization. In Zimbabwe, there is a tendency by teachers to be negative to new frames of knowledge, especially if the latter involve knowledge considered "traditional" and "primitive" by Western standards. It is the hierarchical ordering of knowledge that teachers and academics should be challenged to overcome. Hierarchies give power and domination to one form of knowledge and disempower and marginalize the *Others* (Shiva, 1997). So teachers and academics in Zimbabwe should act as change agents and cultural-brokers that are open to new ways of knowing. Academic institutions should lead in the de-reification of Western scientific knowledge and initiate a new consciousness that acknowledges the importance of other types of knowledge.

Knowledge hybridization: parental and community involvement

The existence of plural forms of knowledge in Zimbabwe means that teachers and academics are not the repositories and only source of all knowledge. Knowledge is a social, political, ideological and cultural enterprise and owned by various stakeholders in diverse *fields*. The community is one of these Bourdieuan *fields*, the home, the school, and others, where students' *habiti* are shaped. These sites, principally the family and the community, engender the behavioral and cognitive dispositions that a child internalizes. These internalized dispositions are what Bourdieu (1984,) calls "habitus, the internalized and embodied social structures" (p. 468). These are mental or cognitive structures through which people deal with their social world. According to McDonough (1998),

"Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus to refer to a deeply internalized, permanent system of outlooks, experiences, and beliefs about the social world that an individual gets from her [or his] immediate environments. Habitus is a common set of subjective perceptions held by all members of the same group or class that shapes an individual's expectations, attitudes, and aspirations." (p.184)

Bourdieu (1984) observes that social groupings cohere by virtue of similarities in habitus and fields and, similarly, in types of capital within the fields they occupy. Fields are the "networks of relations among the objective positions within it" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). The field is described as a "type of competitive marketplace in which various kinds of capital are employed and deployed" (Atkin, 2000, p. 258). The social world is a web of intersecting multi-dimensional spaces and fields that include the economy, education, religion, polity, and the family. Knowledge originates from these

fields, and members of the community are legitimate co-creators of school knowledge. This implies that in Zimbabwe, academics, teachers, students, parents, and members of the community in which the educational institution is located need to work together cooperatively to determine and construct school knowledge. It is important to note that indigenous people in Zimbabwe, in colonial times and today, were not and are not socialized initially in a way that internalizes the beliefs, behavior and dispositions of the Western social world. They are socialized in the social worldview that portrays and represents the subjective perceptions, expectations, attitudes and aspirations of their families and communities in which they are members. The colonial worldview that was imposed on them was a form of rupture that disconnected them from their social and cultural habitus. It is this colonial worldview, that was made the content of knowledge and passed on to indigenous students through Western schooling, that needs to be debunked.

Education [schooling] is a contested terrain, which is traversed by competing and contradictory constructions of knowledge (Giroux, 1992; Simon, 1994). In Zimbabwe the contestations and contradictions can be overcome if academic institutions take cognizance of the importance of the communities in which they are located. Local communities should be utilized as vital resources for knowledge production. Since knowledge is a product of people's socio-cultural milieu, communities are active *cultural fields* for creating knowledge. A close-knit partnership should therefore be established between communities and academic institutions. Effective partnerships can be inexpensive and simple, such as the establishment of a long-term arrangement between social studies teachers, sociology and anthropology academics and scholars, and local indigenous people. Students and scholars can go into the community to engage in hands-on research into the history and science associated with particular people in their locations and sites.

A broader educational partnership can be as comprehensive as to enable communities in Zimbabwe to systematically provide a curriculum with an indigenous focus (Freire, 1985). Academics, teachers and students would become cultural workers who transform institutions into cultural centers or spheres (Giroux, 1992) where the community gets involved so that schools can initiate pedagogies that constitute historical representations of difference. These representations would acknowledge that multi-culturalism is a feature of the Zimbabwean society and of the schooling enterprise. Collective memories of the diverse cultural groups in Zimbabwe, owned by parents, elders and others, should make knowledge pluralism the essence of curricular reforms located at the intersection of cross-cultural texts and images. Cross-cultural texts and images give due regard to the diversity of the history of people who live in particular societies (hooks, 1994). Knowledge of the past is important in determining the present and the future aspirations of the people and how they can solve problems in their socio-cultural and socio-economic lives. Simon (1994) recognizes the importance of integrating the past and the present when he states:

“Acknowledging and grappling with the complexity of this assumed educative relation between present and past is important to those of us who - as cultural workers and teachers - create, organize, distribute and structure engagements with commemorations.” (p.131)

Commemoration, according to Giroux (1992), incorporates a set of evaluations that structure what memories should inform our social imagination from which social change emanates and from where knowledge pluralism arises. Parents and other members of the community are owners of this variety of knowledge.

Knowledge pluralism removes the Zimbabwean teacher from the center of knowledge production and dissemination and transforms him/her into one of the participants in its creation. The community and the school become active co-participants in constructing and reconstructing school and classroom life. Hall (1996) perceives cultures as encompassing not only cultural institutions, but also symbols and representations. And who are in a better position in Zimbabwe to articulate and disseminate knowledge and its cultural symbols and representations than the local people themselves? Local people, elders, and parents find voice and space to use culture as a form of discourse to construct meanings that influence and organize actions and the meaning of science relevant to their communities. Their involvement in school life is likely to assist both teachers and students to re-define, re-interpret, express and act upon school science critically. In essence, critical consciousness is necessary for social change and important in challenging hegemonic dominant knowledge constructs that are found and legitimized by colonial pedagogical practices (Freire & Faundez, 1989). Parental involvement provides a counter-commemoration to that portrayed by Western colonial knowledge and science in particular, that devalues the Zimbabwean indigenous cultural knowledge and science as baseless and unscientific. Teachers of science should aim at teaching for critical consciousness, teaching for social justice, development, social change and empowerment. By teaching for empowerment, they will transform both students and parents into agents of social change and community development (Freire, 1971). This may best be accomplished by recognizing that both Western science and local knowledge have an equal place in the science curriculum in Zimbabwe.

Knowledge pluralism and hybridization replaces the missing voice that was previously marginalized and subordinated by colonial educational practices. Education represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations (Mohanty, 1994). When indigenous knowledge is incorporated into the science curriculum, it neutralizes the power differentials created by colonial Western values. Involving academics, the indigenous elite, parents, elders, and students as cultural workers within the institutional dynamics of educational corridors creates cultural spaces for equalizing oppositional histories of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial realities. Thus, the educational space becomes a central terrain where power and politics operate out of the lived experiences and culture of individuals and social groups situated in the asymmetrical social and political positions they occupy in society (Bernstein, 1996). A combination of stakeholders channeling their efforts towards an educational process that is inclusive and democratic is the precursor to effective and sustainable social change. We should realize that we are living in times of change and uncertainty, where many groups are challenging existing structures, calling into question previously held beliefs and ideologies.

Conclusion

Knowledge is a product of people's everyday experiences and is particular to societies as it takes meaning from forms of life within which it is constructed. Anyone seeking to change the social and economic system of people in Zimbabwe should first carefully examine existing indigenous knowledge and belief systems. Imposing dominant knowledge destroys the very conditions for local alternatives to sustainable development. Indigenous knowledge is made to disappear when the dominant system negates the very existence of indigenous knowledge or when the dominant knowledge system erases or acts as a barrier to the reality which the local knowledge represent in the socio-economic lives. Thus, education which is not a neutral enterprise should provide an enabling discourse that reflects and re-scripts knowledge as a product of cultural and social diversity that exists in contemporary societies.

The educational terrain should be a site for social justice, leveling power relations and empowering people by providing voice to teachers, learners and other community stakeholders interested in the education of their children. Perhaps a change in perspective and direction in African education systems is necessary. It is certainly the direction advocated by many post-colonial theorists and writers. Such a change would serve to strengthen a sense of nationalism and self-worth while also building a secure foundation from which an individual may begin to negotiate the complicated issues of foreign culture and influence and then forge his/her own identity. The difficulty in discovering identity in a post-colonial state can be attributable to a certain lack of self-confidence -- either in an individual or a nation, subconscious or conscious. How can one hold on to one's cultural legacy with pride if it appears to have no value or potential? But if people appreciate those attributes for their true value, they have also discovered the very source of strength required for self-development. With these tools to aid in the journey, the crossroads can be navigated successfully and the subsequent path might lead to a brighter, more positive, but certainly stronger, future.

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