

Decolonial Multicultural Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Dichotomy of Pluriversality in Curricula Craft Context

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Abstract

This article explores decolonial epistemic priorities in Open and distance learning (ODL) multicultural teacher education and training praxis, raises questions about the andragogical approach, and challenges the primary educational goal for students, opining that multicultural teacher education and training has become fixated on a simplistic decoloniality of Western knowledges and practices. Using the internet based asynchronous OBB system; I adopted a qualitative discursive analysis to identify linguistic conventions within the academic discourse message board community of practice as regards the dominate views and values that can be embedded in curriculum craft in post-colonial states. I put forward a case to prioritise the development of learning dispositions in multicultural students that encourage openness to further inquiry and productive ways of thinking in and through complex and contested knowledge terrains with the hope of engendering the concept pluriversality. I argue that this andragogical approach adds a critical dimension to the decolonial task in imbedding first nation's indigenous knowledges, views and/or perspectives rather than mimicking fixated Western priorities.

Introduction

In his introduction to *Globalization and the Decolonial Option* (2010), Walter D. Mignolo invites researchers to consider decolonial thinking “as a particular kind of critical theory and the de-colonial option as a specific orientation of doing”. As a type of critical theory, decolonial thinking becomes an option from which educationists can be critical of existing master/universal narratives that pervade in society and academia. Because the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality project seeks to avoid becoming yet another master theory, scholars are confronted with the challenge of not falling into the trap of thinking about coloniality (colonial matrix of power) “as a model, a theory or an object of study”. To prevent this from happening, Africanists ideologues ought to delink themselves from “the hegemonic and Eurocentred matrix of knowledge”. Likewise as Africans, coloniality implies delinking our thinking from disciplinary constrictions and not thinking about modernity/coloniality/decoloniality from the strict vantage points of established disciplines. Instead, the project preoccupies itself with unearthing and articulating alternative ways of thinking from its dwellings in double consciousness, mestiza consciousness, border thinking, subaltern epistemologies, borders and peripheries of master narratives, and the undersides/darker sides of modernity.

Across the globe first nations, in common with other colonised populations, also assert a “definitive rejection of “being told”...what they are, what their ranking is in relation to the ideal of *humanitas* and what they have to do to be recognised as such” (Mignolo, 2009:161). Race remains a major determinant of graduation rates in post-colonial higher education institutions in South Africa. For contact universities in

almost all areas, the black student completion rate is less than half the white student completion rate (National Planning Commission, 2012). The figures are particularly bad for first nation students of whom only one in five graduated in regulation time. The difficulties black students and first generation students have in completing their degrees on time have major implications for social mobility and the effectiveness of the education system at creating the equitable skills base that will be essential for overcoming the inequalities of apartheid (National Planning Commission, 2012). The study therefore sought to understand how decolonial multiculturalism contexts are include in multicultural teacher training and/or education in South Africa. The following question served to frame the locus point of the study;

What are the views of open and distance learning (ODL) academics on the need to imbed first nation (indigenous) knowledges in order to pluriversalise multicultural teacher education curriculum in post-apartheid dispensation in South Africa?

Discourses of Decolonial Theories

Decolonial theories can be understood contextually by being viewed as the manifestations of and direct challenges to postcolonial education practices. Postcolonial as a concept enters critical discourse in its current meanings in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but both the practice and the theory of postcolonial resistance go back much further (indeed to the origins of colonialism itself). Thus a number of writers who were “postcolonial” *avant la lettre*, including figures like Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, the Caribbean negritude writers, and some US critics whose work also presages some of the positions now labelled postcolonial. The concept means to suggest both resistance to the “colonial” and that the “colonial” and its discourses continue to shape cultures whose revolutions have overthrown formal ties to their former colonial rulers. This ambiguity owes a good deal to post-structuralist linguistic theory as it has influenced and been transformed by the three most influential postcolonial critics Said (1978), Spivak, (1987) and Bhabha, (1994)

Many genealogists of postcolonial thought, including Bhabha (1994) himself, credit Said’s Orientalism as the founding work for the field. Said’s (1978) argument that “the Orient” was a fantastical, real material-discursive construct of “the West” that shaped the real and imagined existences of those subjected to the fantasy, set many of the terms for subsequent theoretical development, including the notion that, in turn, this”

“othering” process used the Orient to create, define, and solidify the “West”. This complex, mutually constitutive process, enacted with nuanced difference across the range of the colonized world(s), and through a variety of textual and other practices, is the object of postcolonial analysis.

Post-structuralism is generally used to refer to a quintet of French theorists whose major influence occurred in the 80s -- Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Roland Barthes. If structuralism relies upon the logic of language, post-structuralism reveals rhetoric as the subversive, poetic sub-conscious of that logic. These writers are post-structuralist in the sense that they demonstrate the dependence of all structures on that which they try to eliminate from their systems. Divergent from one another in many respects, these writers all have in common an attempt to uncover the unquestioned metaphors that undergird social and disciplinary norms, particularly as manifested in philosophy (Derrida), historical writing and the professions (Foucault), psychoanalysis (Lacan), and literary studies (Kristeva and Barthes. Mimicking western cultures

Divergent from one another in many respects, these writers all have in common an attempt to uncover the unquestioned metaphors that undergird social and disciplinary norms, particularly as manifested in philosophy (Derrida), historical writing and the professions (Foucault), psychoanalysis (Lacan), and literary studies (Kristeva and Barthes). All to one degree or another cross disciplinary boundaries, however, and all use variants of rhetorical analysis to reveal the constructed nature of such taken-for-granted objects and concepts as "humanity," "history," "the body," "the self," or "experience," and the co-dependence of such apparent oppositions as "power/resistance," or "masculine/feminine." Rather than attempt to list all the important works by these prolific writers, I cite here only collections that can be used as introductions to their larger bodies of work, followed by a few American applications of their ideas.

Orientation of study

The Maoist era of China as a country has been becoming more capitalist and it appears that Communism is slowly on its way out. Perhaps it has been realized that Communism does not work while Capitalism does, and China has been looking to Western societies for inspiration. Yunxiang Yan (1997: 113) supports this argument when he notes, "There is a new tendency to absorb foreign cultural influences, a trend that the Chinese political system resisted during the Maoist era (1949-78)". The government is not absorbing foreign influences because China thinks foreigners are more correct or superior than China; the Chinese government is only interested in the ideas of the West because they want to achieve economic success.

However, the people in the Sub-Sahara and China included, view Americans differently than the government. Young citizens think of foreign influences, such as flashy lifestyles for example as a culture they want to mimic. Americans are thought of as modern, exotic and exciting. Flashy and leafy suburbs are in fact thought of as a promise for the modernization of Sub-Saharan Africa and other third world countries. In the eyes of the post-colonial residents, mimicking western cultural identities are the promise of modernity. The study was framed by the inkling to understand and appreciate post-colonial curricula craft in higher education institutions in the Sub-Sahara Africa given the hegemonic and Eurocentred matrix of knowledges.

Decoloniality has been called a form of "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo 2011: 122-123), "epistemic de-linking" (Mignolo 2007: 450), and "epistemic reconstruction" (Quijano 2007: 176). This is because pluralism emphasizes a celebration of diversity divorced of any real critical analysis of oppressive dynamics or socio-historical context. Like liberal multiculturalism, pluralism operates as a form of regulation because it fails to explore or problematize disparities in power and privilege or the hegemony of whiteness and Western norms in the United States culture such as "economic mobility, middle-class affluence, [and] family values" (Quijano 2007:17). Thus, pluralistic multiculturalism denies students' real experiences with oppression, and operates through whiteness by assuming a right and invisible norm through which difference is celebrated, as long as that difference doesn't stray too far from expected conformities (Richardson & Villenas, 2000).

Deconial Multicultural Education in South Africa

Contemporary decolonial educationists include ever-expanding applications and conceptualizations of gender and queer theories, as well as multicultural and first nations studies at various educational levels particularly in post-apartheid Africa. Expanding recognition of the articulation between scholarship and activism in fact begins to dissolve the arguably artificial boundary between decolonial educational policies, between decolonial thought and action by recognizing that the way in which scholars view "the causes,

forms, and consequences of social movements has significant implications for how [they] understand their potential, the stakes involved and the meaning of the political [or decolonial] itself.” Scholars-those usually concerned primarily with analytics-who fail to recognize the connection between politics or decoloniality and the production of knowledge are those most likely to reflect “an underlying acceptance of capitalist modernity, liberal democracy, and individualism” (Juris & Khasnabish 2013: 6) values which decoloniality seeks to challenge.

Pluralistic multiculturalism, as a means to equal opportunity for non-dominant culture students, offers marginal culture members mainstream culture literacy so they can gain greater cultural capital and succeed in the dominant culture, as well as empowerment through validation of their own backgrounds. Educationists highlight successful minority examples to emphasize a “you can do it too” attitude, while ignoring power relations, growing economic disparities, and the powerlessness, violence, and poverty that so many marginalized children experience in South Africa. Thus, pluralistic multiculturalism misleadingly treats psychological affirmation devoid of political empowerment as the key to emancipation.

Kincheloe & Steinberg (1997) interestingly wrote:

Such multiculturalism consistently mistakes European ways of seeing for universal, neutral and objective methods of exploring reality. Such methods insidiously support the status quo, conveying in the process the deficiency of non- Western ways of producing knowledge. Make no mistake; the concept of difference is valorised in this context, but always from the position of whiteness. (p. 18)

Thus, the safe diversity paradigm of pluralistic multiculturalism enables the normalized Western *us* to understand the different, ethnic *them* through a lens of privilege and power devoid of critical analysis or self-reflection, further exploiting marginalized people and reinforcing disparities (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

Decolonial Education epistemics and multiculturalism

In its critique of a “modern/colonial/capitalist/patriarchal world-system” decolonial theory addresses the continuity of colonial power relations through the categorization and representations of gender, race and class. It therefore aims for a transformation of Eurocentric epistemologies, stressing the importance of the production of knowledge in different (local) geopolitical contexts. By giving bodily experiences involved in the production of knowledge a central place, proponents of decolonial theory support a serious rethink of social sciences’ canons and methods.

In other words, colonialism has been one of the historical experiences constitutive of coloniality; but coloniality is not exhausted in colonialism, as it includes many other experiences and manifestations which still operate in the present day South Africa. Even when the process of colonization has finished, coloniality remains operative as a form of power which produces, uses, and legitimizes differences between societies, subjects, and forms of knowledge. Although decolonial thought does seem to recognize constants in the human being - especially what Paulo Freire (1972) calls the impulse to “be more” - it views the present human subject as constructed to a large extent by coloniality.

Central concepts such as *pluriversalism*, *coloniality of power*, *border critical thinking* and *transmodernity* fail to engender hegemonic influences on socio-economic fabric of multicultural peoples as those in charge of transforming education systems remain transfixed in colonial mind-set. First nation knowledges remain “remain unimportant and irrelevant as Western crafted modernity continues to dominate education

discourse. Moreover, the discourse about the relevance of the *decolonial turn* in the context of research on processes of Europeanisation and migration patterns in the globe continue to influence issues of economy and education.

Imbeddedness of pluriversality in Decolonial Education

Decolonial education not only aims at problematizing the coloniality of knowledge incarnated in Eurocentric academic institutions and modernist narratives. It also aims to bring about other worlds. Hence, decolonial education gives rise to an ethics and a politics of *pluriversality* (a combination of the words “pluri” and “universality”). Standing in opposition to global and totalitarian designs, created in the name of universality (which usually means a particularity claiming to be universal), pluriversality is an attempt to make visible and viable a multiplicity of knowledges, forms of being, and visions of the world. Pluriversality is equality-in-difference, the possibility that many worlds can fit in one world. It is the future alter-native to modernity / coloniality.

This pluriversality is envisioned as taking place on all levels of life. In intellectual life, it is envisioned as taking place especially through what some decolonial thinkers call “transdisciplinarity” and “transculturality.” Transdisciplinarity means crossing the lines of the plurality of disciplines. It means different disciplines working together and not simply borrowing a few of each other’s insights. Of course, such transdisciplinarity would require important transformations in the present university and academic bureaucracy which usually operates by establishing unbreachable borders between programmes, departments, and faculties. For its part, tran-sculturality means a real dialogue of wisdom which shows that the *hubris* of “point zero” is not only impoverished and unsustainable but also culturally marked. It means a dialogue which abandons any pretence to pure objectivity as impossible and reveals such pretence as nothing more than a covert technique for imposing one particular culture on others.

The project of decolonization

The project of decolonization proposes a displacement of the theo- and ego- hegemonic logic of empire into a geo-political and a body-logic of knowledge. This project arises from a de-classification and de-identification of imperially denied subjects, as a de-colonial policy and epistemology that affects both the political and economic control of neoliberalism and capitalism, each frameworks of the imperialist project. The decolonization process begins when these same agents or subjects, who inhabit the denied languages and identities of the Empire, become aware of the effects of coloniality on being, body and knowledge. This process does not imply a call to an external element/actor/project but a movement towards an exteriority which make visible the difference in the *space of experience* and *the horizon of expectations* registered in the colonial space. Is this a proposal of cultural relativism? No. What Mignolo suggests is a *questioning of the posture taken from divisive borders*. In other words, the borders that both unite and separate modernity/coloniality.

Clearly, we are advocates for the analysis of settler colonialism within education and education research and we position the work of Indigenous thinkers as central in unlocking the confounding aspects of public schooling. We, at least in part, want others to join us in these efforts, so that settler colonial structuring and Indigenous critiques of that structuring are no longer rendered invisible. Yet, this joining cannot be too easy, too open, too settled. Solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict. There are parts of the decolonization project that are not easily absorbed by human rights or civil rights based approaches to educational equity.

Decolonial Education in multicultural teacher education and training

Alternate pedagogical approach for equipping students with understandings and analytical tools that can make explicit the conditions of the knowledge complexity Indigenous peoples confront as they move forward in their efforts to “decolonize” knowledge, assert Indigenous analysis, reassert Indigenous “ways of being, knowing and doing”, or generate new knowledge to transform Indigenous social conditions (Nakata, Nakata, Keach and Bolt 2012). The inclusionary framework developed currency through broader educational agendas of, for example, “Inclusive Curriculum” (e.g., Blackburn, 1985), “Social Justice Education” (e.g., Connell, 1992), and “Multi-cultural Education” (Banks & McGee Banks, 2009) which all come together to represent the institutional accommodation of diversity more generally and embed the agendas of social justice and reconciliation with Indigenous Australia, more specifically.

The synergies with Latin American decolonising approaches drawn from the work of Paulo Freire (1972), Donald Macedo (1999), Walter Mignolo (2007), and others (e.g., De Lissovoy, 2010; Monaldo-Torres, 2011) are evident in Australian approaches. Critical Theory’s great attraction lies in its promise of overcoming ‘dominant’ power relations and delivering “empowerment” to Indigenous people on the ground in the form of practical action in Indigenous interests. An assumption is that this knowledge production is transparent and Indigenous participants are self-knowing, apolitical agents of knowledge when producing knowledge in their own contexts and on Indigenous terms. The “knowledge in action” approach (following Habermas, 1984-1987) also marries well with Indigenous approaches to re-utilise the colonially usurped traditional knowledge of Indigenous collectives. Critical theory, particularly as it came to apply in teaching and learning areas (e.g., Murphy & Fleming, 2009), is also drawn into the production of ideological and oppositional analysis via “grassroots” knowledge production in Indigenous communities in a way that animates political resistance to dominating Western theory and intellectualism.

Methodological frame for the study

In her study of chat rooms, Balfour (2004) concludes that the concept of Internet community is indeed based on a particular communication system, a specific linguistic behaviour. Dingwell (2004) agrees, citing conventionalized language use as an indicator of an Internet chat community. As sources of common linguistic behaviour, online message boards (OBB) can then be considered communities of practice (CoPs). At an asynchronous level, different kinds of discussion forums exist including bulletin boards. These have become precursors for other asynchronous facilities such as Usenet newsgroups and mailing lists. Bulletin boards represent a forum for people with one or more common interests to interact, and thus a community of practice (CoP) approach to their interaction should be applicable, based on this "mutual engagement in an endeavour".

Using the internet based asynchronous OBB system; I adopted a qualitative discursive analysis to identify linguistic conventions within the academic discourse message board community of practice. Determining the extent of linguistic systematicity within the community demanded a large amount of data (110 356 words), while an examination of variations within the identified system rather required a micro-analysis. In order to recognize potential patterns warranting careful investigation, a corpus of OBB postings was composed from three different university sites. OBB postings reveal an exploitation of both the written and spoken qualities of Internet discourse, establishing the medium as the ideal forum for members of the academic to interact. Contributors took advantage of this unique platform to exhibit their knowledge of multicultural curricula craft, allowing their own multicultural identities to emerge through interaction with others who possess or value the same expertise. Individual multicultural identities are discursively

constructed within OBB postings via three distinct strategies of discourse: positioning of self, positioning of other, and performing identity through verbal articulations.

I followed the postings of 12 academic lecturers over a period of four months representing different demographics. In each of the four months there were between five and eight participants, ranging in ages between 35 and 60. The groups were largely made up of Black, White, academics of Asiatic origin and bi-cultural, the so called Coloured people in that same age range.

After four months addresses were edited out, the corpus totalled 110 356 words (tokens) with 13 124 distinct types. Atlas-ti was used to analyse the corpus in terms of key words, word frequency, and sorted lists. The results of the analysis reveal that the referential content of OBB postings were about the positioning of *self* and *other*, while their form represents performance strategies, each contributing to discursive constructions of multicultural identities. Ethical approval for the research was gained from the University of South Africa Ethics Committee and the research was conducted within guidelines of the University of South Africa Ethics Committee. Pseudonyms were deployed to ensure participants' anonymity during the write-up. Any identifying information that appeared in any of the interviews was either removed or substantially altered.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study used the following question to analyse discourses of academics on imbedding appropriate South African teacher education curriculum methodologies given the complexities of multicultural divergences;

Moderator posting: X

How can South Africa's teacher education universities (TEUs) develop decolonised and multicultural reformations of knowledges and politics in the training of teachers? **Posted: 25 May 2013: Time: 10:15 PDT**

The moderator's question was informed by decolonial thought that insinuate that a powerful challenge to Eurocentrism in education has come from the burgeoning postcolonial literature (e.g. Barkawi and Laffey, 2006; Blaney and Inayatullah, 2002, 2003; Darby, 1997, 2004; Hobson and Hall, 2010). Although highly influential in redirecting and maintaining theoretical and analytical attention to the significant absence of the non-West in education theory, postcolonial education has, thus far, not succeeded in supplanting Eurocentric education. There was need therefore to understand how multicultural teacher educators transform their curricula by imbedding first nation (indigenous) knowledges. Substantial amount of participants discourses seem to suggest that;

“Among others, decolonizing Africa implies opening colonial Africa's geopolitical, social, racial, and epistemic frontiers, and dismantling the incorporated and institutionalized forms of coloniality that it foments and defends. The decolonization of Africa also passes through the support and solidarity with rebel dignities throughout the world, within and beyond Africa. The actions of these rebel dignities destabilize and negate the Africa that sustains itself upon violence and the nullification of other ways of being and acting in the world”. **Posted: 01 April 2013 Time: 08:40 PDT**

An important aspect of this failure has been its susceptibility to what Hedley Bull (1966) called the fallacy of the “domestic analogy”. Decolonizing from this global coloniality becomes the main epistemological horizon of the decolonial option. Decoloniality means here decolonization of knowledge and being by epistemically and affectively de-linking from the imperial/colonial organization of society. In spite of this veritable history of anti-Eurocentric thought and practice, mounting critique, obvious counter-facts, and logical tensions, Eurocentrism continues to exert influence in the academy, in national and international policy making centres, and among the elites and the intelligentsia of non-Western “developing” countries (Friedman, 2006; Ganji, 2008; Jones, 2003: ix–xl; Landes, 2003; Sen, 1999). This influence is certainly closely related to the ideological dimension of Eurocentrism, the fact that it sustains and is sustained by the global dominance of the Western-cantered configurations of economic, technological, and military power.

By means of analyzing these narratives of re-existence for Fanon education is always political education. In practice all education is political and education is political in all its forms of socialization and in its disciplines. In other words education helps us organize our lives, helps us think and act, help us think and create images of justice. Fanon means something different by political education. Just as for Fanon culture has to become a fighting culture, education has to become about total liberation. Decolonial education has to be a total critique and a transformative experiential process. Indeed this notion of education as transformative is often recognized on the private level in the rhetoric of individual entrepreneurship that often powers the discourse of the university’s value, but the issue for a decolonial *national* education is an education that helps create a social consciousness and a social individual. Fanon is not concerned with educating the power elites to lead but to promote self-confidence among the mass of people, to teach the masses, as he puts it, that everything depends on them. This is not simply a version of community or adult education and certainly not of a hyperdermic notion of conscientization. Let me give an example that focuses less on content than form.

In the revolutionary moment of the anticolonial struggle Fanon writes of the “honest intellectual”, who, committed to social change, enters what he calls an “occult zone,” engaging the notion of the transformation of reality with a real sense of uncertainty while also coming to understand what is humanly possible. This zone is a space that is being shaped by a movement which, he says in “On National Culture”, is beginning to call everything into question (1968 227).

This postcolonial concern has been articulated through two composite leitmotifs: difference-resistance and hybridity-ambivalence. The first motif tends to involve an apotheosis of a pristine “self” as the basis of resisting the “other”. The second motif, which is currently dominant, by contrast, displays an anti-foundationalist thrust that problematizes all boundaries, epistemological and ontological, between the self and the other, the West and the non-West. The resulting tension has impelled some postcolonialists to veer between the two motifs (Said, 1993; but see Selby, 2006) or seek to reconcile them tactically (Spivak, 1993). Influenced by poststructuralism, later postcolonialists have instead concentrated on postcolonial conditions of hybridity and ambivalence in order to illuminate the ways in which subaltern praxes subverted the Eurocentric vision of a universal, singular, and mono-temporal history for non-Western modernity (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1994).

In such cases it is not assumed that you have to be talking about your culture but can function as a theoretically minded person. As we know: the first world has knowledge, the third world has culture; Native Americans have wisdom, Anglo Americans have science. The need for political and epistemic de-linking here comes to the fore, as well as decolonializing and de-colonial knowledges, necessary steps for imagining and building democratic, just, and non-imperial/colonial societies. The process of

decolonization which Zeleza (2003: vi) calls the “proudest moment” of African nationalism, is believed to have marked the triumphalism of black liberatory nationalism over white exploitative and oppressive colonialism.

Thus decolonization was just a facade barely disguising the continuation of colonization by other means and leading to the mere “flag” (or juridical) independence of utterly impotent and powerless quasi-states lacking the substance of sovereignty (Muiu and Martin 2009: 56).

Recommendations

In this format, multicultural education becomes an exotic treat to be consumed by privileged whites for their intellectual titillation, or perhaps to improve their business acumen among non-dominant and foreign prospects. In some cases, as described earlier, multiculturalism is used as an avenue for assimilation of non-dominant groups to Eurocentric discourses.

Conclusion

Decolonial theories can be understood contextually as the manifestations of and direct challenges to postcolonial education practices. Therefore the challenge concerning formal education is seen by Afrocentrists to be that African student teachers are taught to perceive the world through the eyes of another culture, and unconsciously learn to see themselves as an insignificant part of their world. An Afrocentric education does not necessarily wish to isolate Africans from a Eurocentric education system but wishes to assert the autonomy of Africans and encompass the cultural uniqueness of all learners.

At teacher education institutions African values, it is believed, would eliminate the patterns of rejection and alienation that engulf so many first nation students in Africa. The study findings indicate that the movement for African-centred education is based on the assumption that an institution immersed in African traditions, rituals, values, and symbols will provide a learning environment that is more congruent with the lifestyles and values of first nations in Africa. Findings also indicate that there is rigidity in teacher education methodological approaches and that has a tendency to detrimentally influence critical dimension to the decolonial task in imbedding indigenous knowledges, views and/or perspectives rather than mimicking fixated Western priorities.

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