



NEW DIRECTIONS
IN AFRICAN EDUCATION:
CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

Edited by S. Nombuso Dlamini

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INTRODUCTION

S. Nombuso Dlamini

The purpose of this volume is to reconceptualize and reinvent education in order to suit and serve pressing socioeconomic needs in the African continent. The chapters in this book are written by continental African scholars who, prior to pursuing graduate studies in North America, did the majority of their schooling in educational institutions in Africa. Each respected scholars in their respective disciplinary areas, contributors in this volume present perspectives that provide a current view of the conditions for and of education in Africa and put forward measures that need to be taken to address what has been referred to as an educational crisis on the continent.

Now academics, with experiences of teaching in African and/or North American classrooms, the contributors are well aware of the needs and levels of understanding of their students and colleagues about the African continent. Their chapters reflect their intimate and informed knowledge and experiences, and each chapter is enlivened with thick description (Geertz, 1973) emerging from a blending of empirical studies and theoretical writings about Africa and the Americas, and offer readers thoughtful analyses of the complex intricacies inherent in the educational concepts, curricula, and socio-cultural issues that the authors address in their texts.

In examining the state of education in Africa, chapters in this volume have a common narrative thread that borrows from Mbembe's notion of the "postcolony," which concerns itself "specifically [with] a given historical trajectory – that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonisation and the violence which the colonial relationship involves. ... the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic; it has nonetheless an internal coherence" (2001, p. 102). From this vantage point, in the postcolony, state power is understood as creating:

... through administrative and bureaucratic practices, its own world of meanings – a master code that, while becoming the society's central code, ends by governing, perhaps paradoxically, the logics that underlie all other meanings within that society; (2) attempts to institutionalise this world view of meanings as a "socio-historical world" and to make the world real, turning it into people's "common sense" not only by instilling it in the minds of the *cibles* or "target population," but also by integrating it into the period's consciousness. (2001, p. 103 – emphasis in the original)

In looking at the colonial roots of the current educational crisis in Africa, the authors have moved forward to examine the complex relationship that postcolonial African leaders have had with the colonial past, their efforts in drawing from indigenous knowledge and ways of being while simultaneously working to create a common sense that suits their personal and often corrupt economic interest, thereby suppressing political consciousnesses that might result in exposing their corruption and hegemonic tendencies. In other words, in their examination of relations of power in the postcolony, these authors have moved away from using simple oppositional binaries in which the Colonial Era is characterized by social, cultural, economic, and political violence and political independence is presented as the beginning of freedom marking emerging civil liberties and social and cultural reconstruction.

The chapters in this volume perceptively illustrate some of the many ways in which the past, imbued as it is with violent practices, is intertwined with the present, and how, to borrow from Mikhail Bakhtin, within "non-official" cultures, especially those that have been created in the postcolonial era, systems and structures of domination and subordination are found. Differently stated, the education

crisis in Africa is said to be also rooted in the practices of African leaders who, since independence, have done little to change the malfunctioning policies and practices inherited from colonial regimes. As authors in this volume demonstrate, post-independence leaders have not embarked on meaningful activities towards transforming education in Africa, and, where such actions have been taken, they have been devastatingly shaped by commercial and capitalist interests. These authors are products of this crisis- and conflict-laden education system that, while aiming to offer intellectual tools with which to “write back” to the empire, in many ways, failed to offer them lenses for understanding and appreciating indigenous knowledge. The education received by these authors was presented in Western terms; for instance, the meanings of “power,” “peace,” and “freedom” were presented as Western phenomena, and, when mentioned, the African continent was presented only in the context of the “white man’s” involvement with it. Textbooks used in schools only testified to the power of whites as great thinkers and great inventors: Galileo unlocked the workings of the heavens, Gutenberg discovered printing, and Newton solved the mysteries of gravity in physics. In this regard, the chapters in this book call for a need for African education to rid itself of this Eurocentric legacy of white supremacy.

What, then, are the educational areas of focus that should be examined and reconfigured in order to make new directions in the education of African children? There are three crosscutting themes that emerge in the way educational issues are discussed in this volume. First are discussions about gendered relations in the postcolony and how gendered inequities impact the practice of educating and women’s chances of enjoying human rights. Another theme is that of language, which is intricately examined as an important resource affecting the delivery of curriculum content as well as influencing chances of economic development and success. The third theme woven throughout this volume attends to social and cultural issues, including the social welfare of citizens, especially of those with physical disabilities. Implicit throughout this volume are the authors’ articulations and explorations of new initiatives as well as new directions towards a politically informed action-oriented education in Africa.

GENDER, ACCESS, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Actions that would improve the social role and economic livelihood of women have always been part of discourses in both the colony and the postcolony (Dlamini, 2001); yet to date, women in Africa are still disadvantaged by restrictive application of human rights policies, limited opportunities, and economic inequalities. Related to the lack of rights and economic inequalities, women face a system of sexist oppression, which pervades every aspect of life – that is, women face the rule of patriarchy and erroneous patriarchal relations of power, of gender inequity, that others have argued, run deeper than class exploitation and racial discrimination (see, for example, Millett, 1990). Examining the relationship between class and gender in Burkina Faso, Sankara (1988) argues that there is a close parallel between class exploitation and women's inferior status and that women's subjugation has survived and has been consolidated, both in the activities of everyday life and in intellectual and moral repression. Thus, in the postcolony, to facilitate patriarchal relations of power, traditions are rediscovered, and in some instances created, and practices that have long been contested are restored and given a central defining role, and signs regulating gender relations become bound up with notions of cultural reconstruction and authenticity.

In the chapters “Reproductive Health in Kenya” and “Gender, Post-Secondary Education, and Employment Opportunities for Women in Tanzania,” Jacinta Muteshi and Grace Puja, respectively, take a detailed look at the various discourses that, when enacted, ensure women's subjugation and gender inequality in Africa. Although many advances and contributions to the status of women in Africa have been made, these authors argue that there is a pressing need for African governments to seriously put women, as a social category, at the forefront of national agendas. In colonial Africa, struggles for women's emancipation did not go hand in hand with national resistance movements; consequently, the “women's issue” failed to become part of the nationalist agenda. Currently, the problem of continued marginalization of women in Africa is compounded by what Kristeva (1986) argues is the globalization of problems of women in different milieux, ages, civilizations, and varying psychic structures. In this regard, Jacinta Muteshi's chapter “Reproductive Health in Kenya” argues that issues

facing Kenyan women require local solutions. Further, she points out the limitations of comparing the struggles of women in Kenya to the struggles experienced in other countries, suggesting as an alternative the need and utility of contextualizing the social position of Kenyan women within the context of Kenyan Nationalist discourses. Writing on the role education can play in redressing the sexual and reproduction health rights of women in Kenya, Muteshi demonstrates how a comparative lens, if used to understand reproductive health issues in Kenya, can do more damage than it can offer solutions for girls. Muteshi demonstrates this danger in discussing, for example, access to sexual reproductive health services, in which she states that, while studies indicate that “it is common for young people in Kenya to start having sex in their early teens ... what is not so well known is that, unlike in western nations, where sexually active adolescents are unmarried, in developing countries most are married and therefore face different challenges from their single counterparts.” Conversely, Muteshi argues that, since access to health services and to education is a human right yet to be realized by many Kenyans, strategies to combat this social issue need to be formulated within the context from which they emerge rather than through borrowing a global approach to gender inequities. According to Muteshi, another related concern is that the language used to write policy documents about this human right should be illustrative of government commitment and should include stipulated measures of accountability.

Following a view that, in the west, has come to be associated with Millett, Puja argues that the social organization of families, whereby girls are expected to perform certain house chores that boys are not, affects girls’ success in schools and further conditions boys for roles of power and domination from a very early age. The concern about the right of women to education is also part of Puja’s basis for arguing that the government of Tanzania must rethink its policies regarding women’s access to post-secondary education, which ultimately contour women’s employment opportunities in the labour market. Furthermore, Puja analyzes the ways in which in the post-colony, Eurocentric capitalist ideologies have combined with African patriarchal cultures to establish Tanzania’s current education system. The result of this combination is women’s under-representation in higher and technical education and their subsequent limited employment opportunity. Puja stresses the need for research that looks for

alternatives to current educational policies so that education better promotes equity and improves women's employment opportunities.

LANGUAGE USE, PEDAGOGY, AND DEVELOPMENT

Language has always been a central and often perilous theme in education debates in the postcolony. In many African countries, formal education was introduced by missionaries with the aims of colonizing and training converts to proselytize and spread Christianity as taught in the mission schools. This meant that the Bible was translated into many indigenous languages for teaching purposes. However, not all subjects (geography, history, mathematics, and so on) received the same level of translation. Consequently, as others have argued, this, together with the use of non-indigenous languages as the medium of instruction in schools, may very well account for the failure of modern science and technology to take root and flourish over the past century. Additionally, African education systems of the past and present do not acknowledge the incompatibility of the language of the home and immediate community and that of the school. In many African countries, indigenous communities are multi-ethnic, and children learn their mother language first, then, through early social relations, they acquire other languages that are spoken by the children from one or more other ethnic groups. This means that in cases where, for example, English is used as a medium of instruction, it may not be the students' second language (as in the popular, now globally understood "English as a second language" conceptualization), even after many years of schooling. Furthermore, in many schools, students do not typically speak English to one another or with their teachers outside the classroom (Dlamini, 2005).

In her chapter "Some Issues of Science Education in Africa," Wanja Gitari discusses the fragmentation and disconnection between school knowledge (e.g., in science) and the knowledge students make in their everyday interactions within the local community and family. Several resolutions have been suggested to address this disconnect resulting from the use of languages with colonial origins in education in the postcolony. Some have advocated the use of European languages,

arguing that using/writing in African languages causes the learner/writer to lose both other African readers and Western audiences (e.g., Ojaide, 2005); others have advocated the use of indigenous languages in schools in teaching all courses, including science and technology (Dlodlo, 1999; Bunyi, this volume).

The active force of language in society, its use by individuals and groups to control others, or to defend themselves against being controlled, to change society or to prevent others from changing it (Burke, 1988) has been widely discussed in critical theory and sociolinguistic studies (see, for example, Foucault, 1989, on labelling; Bourdieu, 1982, on symbolic domination; Heller, 1995, on language choice and social institutions; and, Dlamini, 2001, on linguistic discourses). This means that any discussion of the languages of education in the postcolony cannot be divorced from questions of power and cannot be understood without reference to the society in which they are spoken. As part of ideology (used here in the Althusserian sense in which ideology is a system of representations with material existence that works to structure the relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence; that is, it acts as a guide to social reality), languages have been a central force used in the postcolony to convince others about their role in accessing valued resources, both symbolic and material. This is the heart of Grace Bunyi's examination of the current state of language use in Kenyan schools in her chapter "The Place of African Indigenous Knowledge and Languages in Education for Development: The Case of Kenya." Significantly, she examines practices of language use in schools in Kenya and how they are intertwined with societal attitudes, the myth of development, and social, cultural, and economic progress.

In Kenya, Kiswahili, a traditional *lingua franca* encouraged by the British colonizing forces because it facilitated local administration, was given a new function during the independence movement since it was seen as a means of facilitating unity between different ethnic groups in a common political project, of giving them a common consciousness. Ironically, English, the language of former rulers, was also given the same role. Post-independence Kenya, however, witnessed a devaluing of African indigenous languages, including Kiswahili, and a rise in the value of English. By looking at elementary schools in Kenya, some in which English is used as a medium of instruction from the first grade, and others in which Kiswahili is used as

a medium of instruction for the first five years of schooling, Bunyi examines the processes through which African indigenous languages have been delegitimized and denigrated in education. She argues that a meaningful solution to the problem of language in education lies in creating policies that place high value on the role that indigenous languages play in the lives of African children. In this vein, Bunyi's chapter provides a case for why indigenous African languages should be given more of a central role in education.

The question of how teachers teach and what is taught in schools remains the focus of educational debates in both the developed and developing worlds. A well-known way of describing the forms of teacher practice in education is offered by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970), who distinguishes between what he calls a "banking system of education" and a "problem-posing" approach to knowledge production. A banking system of education is one that ignores students' knowledge and in which knowledge is transmitted to students with the aim of having them accept the status quo. In this system, students are considered empty vessels to be filled by the knowledgeable teacher and the historicity of individuals in the learning process is ignored. Conversely, within the framework of a problem-posing education, which places emphasis on dialogue and local knowledge, the students' historicity is taken as the starting point, and the students' knowledge claims are valued.

In the chapter "Some Issues of Science Education in Africa," Wanja Gitari argues that a problem-posing approach to science education in Africa would address the disjointedness of classroom-based information and its applicability to students' everyday lives. Gitari eloquently expresses the uselessness of being well-informed, of having accumulated endless inert knowledge, if one cannot engage with that knowledge. She goes on to discuss education with production, constructivist teaching, science, technology, society, and the environment, anti-racist science teaching, and co-operative learning as equally relevant models of teaching science education. The reason for proposing these models is threefold: first, to elevate the achievement and representation of girls and women in science; second, to examine the soundness of the content knowledge learned in school; and third, to ensure that science graduates are able to readily transfer the science knowledge they gained at school to everyday problem-solving situations. For Gitari, all these models would provide hands-on experience

in learning, facilitate students' self-esteem, lead towards deconstruction and radicalizing the milieu of science discourses and facilitate the overall learning of science. Moreover, Gitari argues that, since these learning approaches appeal to women's ways of knowing, they will enable girls to place science within the context of everyday life.

Access to education, especially to higher education, while a taken-for-granted right in the West, is still a challenge for young people in the postcolony. Moreover, as Eva Aboagye's chapter "Financing Students in Higher Education: Examining Trends and Funding Options in Africa and Canada" indicates, post-secondary education in Africa is under the command of international funding institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, whose interests are more corporate than educational. In her Canada-Ghana comparative study of financing higher education, Aboagye argues that, even though these two areas are different economically, socially, and politically, the issues of cost recovery facing students and governments in these countries are the same. Consequently, in Ghana, preoccupation with cost recovery leads to minute resources being directed towards education; the result is a poor quality of education with declining standards.

In the chapter "Possibilities in African Schooling and Education," George Dei contends that, in order to imagine new possibilities, African peoples must deconstruct the myth of "development" using local, traditional, and indigenous cultural knowledge. He argues that a significant challenge is to unravel how dominant thinking shapes what constitutes development. Today, local peoples continue to struggle for new cultural, economic, and political imaginings and imaginaries. There is a need for new visions and counter-theoretical perspectives of education and development to disentangle "development" and "education" from the grip of dominant paradigms. By working with critical and alternative ideas, educators can think creatively about "education and development" in ways that avoid an easy slippage into the form, logic, and implicit assumptions and postulations of what exactly is being contested. In other words, education for development is not just about an increase in physical and human capital. Education for development requires changes both in ways of thinking and in the social, political, cultural, and economic institutions of society. Local peoples have not been passive recipients of "development" knowledge. Local cultural knowledge and subjectivities have, and can, become important sites of power and resistance to dominant discursive

practices. It is incumbent upon critical scholarship to employ an anti-colonial prism to examine some key issues of African schooling and development, specifically the role of culture: indigenous/local cultural resource knowledge and education in the search for genuine development and educational options for the continent (see Dei, 2004). The reference to anti-colonial thought is relevant in stressing local understandings of the nature and contexts of colonized relations and practices, as well as the recourse to power and subjective agency for resistance, and the promotion of genuine “development” (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2000).

In calling for localized solutions to the African education problem, writers in this volume realize that a call to the local should not mean a return to purity. Instead, the position taken follows that articulated by Stuart Hall (1997), in which the global and the local constitute two aspects of the same phenomenon. Hall sees a return to the local as a response to the seeming homogenization and globalization of culture, which can only work for social change if it is not rooted in “exclusive and defensive enclaves” (p. 36). Arguing against the portrayal of the “local” as inherently wholesome and better than the “global,” Hall writes:

The homeland is not waiting back there for the new ethnics to rediscover it. There is a past to be learned about, but the past is now seen, and it has to be grasped as a history, as something that has to be told. It is narrated. It is grasped through desire. It is grasped through reconstruction. It is not just a fact that has been waiting to ground our identities. (1997, p. 38)

ENGAGING NEW INITIATIVES IN AFRICAN EDUCATION

The creation of the new homeland – through the use of history, the present as well as futuristic desires – is now being shaped by access to new technologies. Information Technology (IT) has challenged old and simplistic concepts of the neat north-south divide, which are now replaced by new geographies of power and access that have re-configured the world. As such, education in Africa needs to recognize

the urgency of responding to a new communication order. Research in the area of IT advances in Africa indicates that several institutions of higher learning have adapted to the changes in communication methods and that, to some degree, IT has become central in the teaching and learning of Information Science/Service because of the great influence of these technologies on the profession (Minish-Mananja, 2004). Such changes in the use of IT come from the realization of a need to produce, for efficiency and effectiveness, graduates equipped with competencies for working in the current information environment, which, though still traditional, is increasingly becoming dependent on IT. Many studies, however, indicate that there is an important need for schools to increase the use of IT in teaching and learning as well as in school administration so as to foster effectiveness and full participation of students in the social, economic, and political realms of life (Burbules and Callister, 2000). Moreover, others point to the need to increase access in order to overcome an already existing digital divide (Mushi, this volume), the need to tap into the unique possibilities offered by IT, and the need to engage in sustained research that examines how IT interfaces with other transformative processes happening simultaneously (Czerniewicz, 2004).

In her chapter “Information Technology and the Curriculum Process,” Selina Mushi addresses this pervasiveness of Information Technology around the world and its implications for the education process. She argues that the use of IT in teaching and learning changes the traditional role of the teacher; yet, this use and access to IT is not evenly experienced across countries because IT trends seem to follow those of the print media. A few centuries ago when the printing press began to emerge in societies, books began to be mass-produced. It was at this juncture that people (mostly the rich) began to immerse themselves in the readily available literature of the time. Many poor and disadvantaged people could not afford books. As a result, those who could afford books emerged as the most literate in societies, leaving the poor and disadvantaged behind. Mushi documents a similar situation with computers and the Internet, which is causing disparities and inequality within communities and nations. Drawing on her experiences as a new graduate student in Toronto, Mushi documents the challenges she faced, which resulted from underexposure to IT in her undergraduate work in Africa. Mushi argues that exposure to IT allowed her to participate more in the learning process, which

consequently led her to examine how teachers respond to students' engagement with technology. Her chapter, then, is an analysis of teachers' responses to students' exposure to IT and concludes that, since students use technology to inform themselves, and are often more knowledgeable than the teacher, teachers' responses to students' knowledge are often not empowering and do not encourage independent learning.

In "Envisioning African Social Work Education," Uzo Anucha critically examines current social work models in Africa and argues that there is a need for new context-based models in the profession. According to Anucha, social work models in Africa have been exported from the West; yet, there is plenty of evidence that the West has failed to come up with answers to many of its own problems, including homelessness, neglect and abuse of children, alcohol and drug abuse, crime, and so on. For this reason, Anucha critiques the transfer of these botched models to other contexts and calls for an African social work education based within an indigenous framework – one that addresses African challenges. She discusses some particular areas of social welfare and development in Africa that would benefit most from an indigenized social work education.

Zephania Matanga's thought-provoking chapter demonstrates how countries all over the world need to critically examine how they treat their citizens who have disabilities. Having conducted a Zimbabwe-Canada comparative study, Matanga contends that challenges faced by people with disabilities all over the world are similar; that they are not community-based but, rather, percolate through national and cultural boundaries. He also challenges the notion that discriminatory practices perpetuated against people with disabilities are either self-inflicted by the disability itself or else merely isolated incidences and localized problems, which are especially prevalent and mostly confined in third world countries. For Matanga, these discriminatory practices persist because of the public's silence, which he considers tantamount to gross neglect and mistreatment.

In conclusion, *New Directions in African Education* conveys the pressing need to rethink how education addresses gender parity, reconfigures the meaning of and engagement in socio-cultural and economic development activities, moves towards new ways of conducting education subjects in and through indigenous languages, engages in the creation of citizens who will be involved in both the

production and consumption of new information technologies, addresses issues of financing education in schools and especially in post-secondary institutions, and moves towards forms of pedagogy that draw from the African experience, resources, knowledge, and local communities. Each chapter begins with an introductory account and a list of ideas or concepts pertinent to the topic; this is followed by a discussion of the content, as well as the theoretical framework or the controversial interpretations that have dominated the ideas conveyed, and a succinct examination of the author's position, which is tied to suggestions about new directions that exist or should be taken in order to fully envelop the theme discussed. A relatively full reference list, which has informed the author's position and may be consulted to get a fuller understanding of the topic and fulfill further scholarly interests, concludes each chapter. It is hoped that by reading these pages many will begin to see how, in the words of Walter Rodney (1972), Europe underdeveloped Africa and how Africa is beginning to deal with the trauma of colonialism and underdevelopment.

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