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Making a Case for a Socio-cultural Approach

Introduction

Since the 1990s, sub-Saharan Africa has experienced unprecedented attempts at reforming teacher and student classroom practices, with a learner-centred pedagogy regarded as an 'effective antidote to the prevalence of teacher-centred didactic classroom practices' (O'Sullivan 2004:585). So intense has the interest in the pedagogy been that almost all African countries are currently in the throes of instructional reform, from South Africa in the south to Egypt in the north, from Ethiopia in the east to Gambia in the west. In fact, learner-centred pedagogy has been described as one of the 'most pervasive educational ideas in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere' (Chisholm and Leyerndecker 2008:197). Its pervasiveness notwithstanding, the pedagogy has done poorly in terms of being institutionalized. Classroom research has tended to attribute this failure by teachers to adopt instructional innovations to technical problems such as poor teacher training programmes leading to poor teacher quality, lack of resources, and selective external examinations (see Barrett 2007; Altinyelken 2010). As a response to these problems, massive investments have been made in interventions such as in-service programmes, workshops and seminars, all aimed at changing the teachers' classroom practices in the desired direction of leaner-centredness. Still, very little visible change in the classroom interactive processes has occurred. This has led some researchers to question the emphasis that classroom researchers put on technical problems as the root cause of innovation failure. For example, King (1989:44), with reference to Africa in general, has observed that:

> What little evidence there is from classroom studies would suggest that the character of the classroom life is perhaps less determined by these material shortages than by the emergence of a teaching and learning that is not supportive of pupil participation and inquiry.

That technical problems have impeded instructional reform in Africa is beyond any doubt. But why has pedagogical change not occurred in spite of so much having been committed to such reform?

To address this question, I argue in this chapter that by being preoccupied with technical problems of innovation delivery, classroom research in sub-Saharan Africa has tended to downplay the importance of the socio-cultural context as a potential barrier to the adoption of instructional innovations. Researchers have tended to adopt what Elliot (1994) terms the 'technicist stance' to problems of pedagogical change and have ignored the wider institutional and social processes which influence the locus of change. In the present chapter I advance a critique of the approach with a view to exposing its limitations. I argue that the dominant technicist approach is in itself problematic to the extent that it can be indicted for stalling the desired pedagogical shift from a teacher-centred pedagogy to a learner-centred one. Too often, however, the approach is not subjected to questioning. It is often assumed that it is not critical to the fate of pedagogical reform.

The technicist framework has a history and has influenced teaching and research on teaching in very fundamental ways. Its limitations emanate from its philosophical basis – Positivism – with its view of professional practice, teaching included, as a value-free activity. My critique of the framework in the early pages of the chapter sets the stage for a proposal later in the chapter for embracing a socio-cultural approach, one that recognizes the political, economic, cultural, anthropological and social grounding of pedagogy. In short, the chapter makes a case for a consideration of *context*, for without an understanding of the latter, we will never be able to explain why efforts to shift to a learner-centred pedagogy have not yielded the desired results.

Defining Pedagogy

Alexander's (2008) definition of pedagogy is more comprehensive than most. He defines pedagogy as:

> …the observable act of teaching together with its attendant discourse of educational theories, values, evidence and justifications. It is what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command, in order to make and justify the many different kinds of decisions of which teaching is constituted" (Alexander 2008:29).

There are two critical elements in this definition: pedagogy as 'the observable act of teaching' and 'pedagogy as ideas' that inform the 'act' of teaching, i.e. the 'educational theories, values, evidence and justifications' that inform teaching.

These two elements are complementary. Notwithstanding this complementarity, the first element (the 'observable act of teaching') is often the one equated with pedagogy, in which case the latter is not distinguishable from 'techniques of teaching'. But emphasis on 'technique' de-contextualizes teaching, rendering it a primarily value-free technical undertaking. The technicist approach, with which I engage in this book, has dominated approaches to curriculum development, research on teaching and pedagogical reform.

My critique of the technicist approach to pedagogy takes off from the premise that teaching is a moral and ethical activity that is context-dependent. This resonates with the second element of Alexander's (2008) definition of pedagogy, that the latter is informed by 'knowledge, values, beliefs and justifications'. At the core of pedagogy, Alexander (2008:29) argues, are 'ideas about learners, learning and teaching, and these are shaped and modified by context, policy and culture'. In other words, pedagogy is imbued with values. To acknowledge context is to acknowledge the temporal and spatial framing of teaching. My discussion of teacher-centred and learner-centred pedagogies in this and subsequent chapters illustrates the social embeddedness of pedagogy.

Learner-centred Pedagogy: A Brief Description

A brief description of the learner-centred pedagogy is in order here. I say 'brief' because a detailed consideration of the pedagogy is carried out in Chapter Three where it is juxtaposed with teacher-centredness to highlight the two pedagogies' paradigmatic differences. For now, just a brief exposé on the nature of learner-centred pedagogy should suffice in contextualizing the argument in this chapter.

Learner-centredness has often been used interchangeably with 'participatory', 'democratic', 'inquiry-based', 'child/student-centred methods' and 'discovery' methods. All these are strands of 'Progressive Methods' whose origins can be traced to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and to the philosophical tradition of empiricism as propounded by the English philosopher John Locke. These strands differ from each other only insofar as they emphasise different degrees of learner autonomy. Connell (1987) observes that it is difficult to categorise the methods of educators who came to be known as the 'Progressives'. Because Progressive Education had many strands, it is difficult to make a short characterization of it without distorting it in the process (Stenhouse 1980). Also, no single organization has succeeded in uniting the progressive 'schools' as a single body (Punch 1977). However, these different strands are united by four common themes: (a) their wish to escape from the formal and

rigid structures of nineteenth and twentieth century education systems; (b) their emphasis on activity as the central element in their methods; (c) their emphasis on the centrality of the learner in the educative process, hence the term learner/student-centred methods; and (d) their common epistemological foundation. With respect to the latter theme, there is general agreement that progressive methods are founded upon the social constructivist epistemology. As a philosophy of knowledge, social constructivism holds that 'knowledge is a product of social processes and not solely an individual construction (William 1999:205). In other words, it is a product of social interaction. As a philosophy of learning, social constructivism rejects the pervasive 'assumption that one can simply pass on information to a set of learners and expect that understanding will result' (Confrey 1990, as quoted in William 1999:207). Thus, Progressive Education views students as active participants in the learning process rather than as meek recipients of ready-made factual knowledge from the teacher. It is often placed in contradistinction to the 'teacher-centred' or 'banking education pedagogy' of Freire (1972). Although in this book I use interchangeably the different strands of Progressive Education identified above, it is the 'learner-centred' strand that I use more often than the others.

Learner-centred Pedagogy in Sub-Saharan Africa

It is now two decades since a learner-centred pedagogy (LCP) was introduced in many sub-Saharan African countries. However, it appears that not much has changed in terms of the quality of teaching; teaching in schools in these countries remains didactic and authoritarian with little or no recognition at all of the learner's potential to actively construct knowledge (see Tabulawa 1997, 1998, 2003 on Botswana; Serbessa 2006 on Ethiopia; O'Sullivan 2004 on Namibia; Jessop and Penny 1998 on South Africa and Gambia; Nykiel-Herbert 2004 on South Africa; Acheampong, Pryor and Ampiah 2006 on Ghana; Stambach 1994 Vavrus 2009; O-saki and Agu 2002 on Tanzania; Mtika and Gates 2010 on Malawi; Altinyelken 2010 on Uganda; Pontefract and Hardman 2005 on Kenya).

Botswana's experience with LCP illustrates the general experience of African countries with pedagogy. Botswana has been experimenting with LCP for almost three decades now, making it one of the oldest experiments with the pedagogy on the African continent. Its first post-independence commission on education, which produced the report *Education for Kagisano* (Social Harmony) (1977), made the observation that teaching in the country put 'excessive emphasis . . . upon abstract learning and memorization and neglect

of practical studies and of acquisition and application of skills' (Republic of Botswana 1977:100). It expressed concern over the tendency of teachers to overstress traditional methods of teaching in classrooms and asserted that to be educated,

> means acquiring confidence, skills and abilities, and the capacity to persuade, organize and act; it means developing an aesthetic and moral sense [and teachers were urged to] relate to pupils as people, not just as receptacles for cognitive materials (p. 107).

What the commission was calling for in these statements was a change in the student-teacher relationship which, in the case of Botswana, has been found to be teacher dominated (Alverson 1977; Fuller and Snyder 1991; Prophet and Rowell 1990; Fuller 1991). This change could only take place if Progressive, learner-centred instructional methods were adopted by teachers. To this end, the commission urged teachers to facilitate learning:

> …through investigations in the library, through observation in the fields or the market, and in group discussion or project work, in preference to formal instruction and written exercises. In curriculum design, the teaching approach is as important as the content (Republic of Botswana 1977:107).

To further emphasise its desire for a pedagogical shift, the commission recommended that, 'Wherever possible throughout the curriculum, instruction should include project work and an applied approach to solving problems' (Republic of Botswana 1977:113).

Given the country's economic buoyancy in the 1980s, large-scale projects were introduced, such as the Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP) and the Secondary Education Improvement Project (JSEIP)... Both projects were committed to a learner-centred education. Consequently, teachers were specially targeted in this reform agenda and significant amounts of resources were committed to a learner-centred pedagogy. For example, in-service programmes were established for teachers, and programmes in teacher education institutions were revised to reflect the government's emphasis on learner-centred education. Evaluations of the projects in the 1990s, however, indicated that they were not living up to expectations:

> Teaching remains firmly in an authoritarian and teacher-centred mode. Students are generally passive recipients of academic verbal information (Prophet and Rowell 1993:205).

> …teacher behaviour in Botswana classrooms is generally simple, involves fewer instructional tools, and is teacher-centred. Most communication occurs between

> the teacher and the full class of students; instructional routines rely on didactic instruction (Fuller et al. 1994:152-3).

> Teaching in Botswana schools remains teacher-centred and teacher dominated. 'Teacher talk' takes precedence over students talk (sic). Although students are not altogether quiet and passive, their engagement in lessons is fairly artificial and comprises short responses to close-ended teacher-initiated questions (Marope 1995:12).
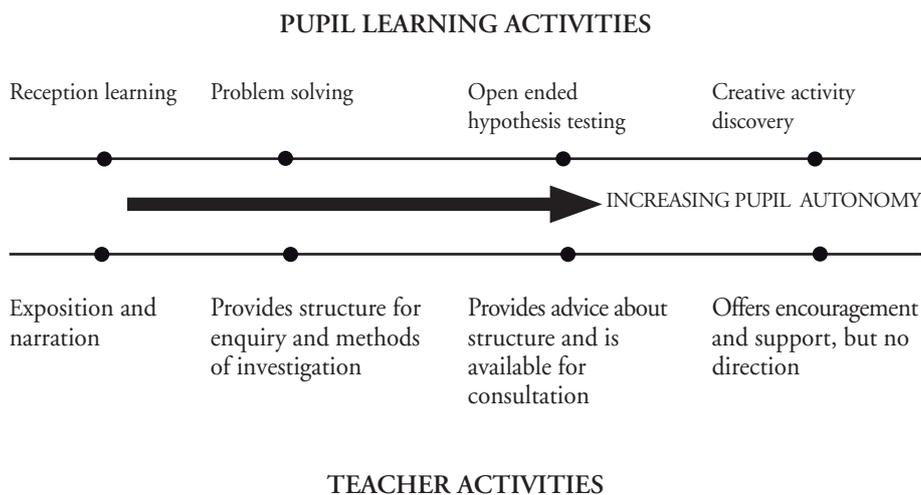
> Despite the commitment of the large-scale aid projects to this [learner-centred] form of teaching, in practical terms the impact on learning and teaching in the schools, and even in the teacher training institutions, has been minimal (Hopkin 1996:11).

Lamentations such as the ones above are commonplace all over Africa although there are faint voices (Croft 2002; Farrel 2002; Barrett 2007) that seem to suggest that the situation in sub-Sahara African classrooms is not as dire as the literature cited above suggests; cases of teachers applying constructivist, learner-centred principles in their predominantly teacher-centred classrooms have been observed, it is claimed. This evidence has prompted some (e.g. Nakabugo and Sieborger 2001; Brodie et al. 2002; Barrett 2007) to decry the opposition often drawn between learner-centred and teacher-centred pedagogies. Nakabugo and Sieborger (2001), for example, argue that 'Setting old and new practices in opposition to each other... obscures the reality that there is a gradual movement from one towards the other...' (p. 60). More recently, Barrett (2007:291), applying Bernstein's concept of pedagogic modes – the 'performance' (teacher-centredness) and 'competence' (learner-centredness) modes – has argued that, 'There is no contradiction between the performance and competence routes if it is accepted that the two modes can co-exist'. Given this alleged co-existence or convergence of pedagogic modes, it is argued that it is possible to talk of 'colourful variations' (Fuller et al. 1994) and a 'hybrid of traditional and reform-oriented practices' (Altinyelken 2010:162) in some African classrooms. Although this literature is certainly growing, at the moment it is still anecdotal and for this reason cannot be adduced as solid evidence of a convergence of the two 'modes' or 'paradigms'. Some of the supporters of the 'convergence thesis' are candid about the modesty of the convergence. For example, Vavrus (2009:310) observes from her Tanzanian study that student-teachers 'used inquiry-based and peer-learning activities as well as more formalistic methods *in their distinctly teacher-centred classrooms*' (emphasis added), suggesting that the observed constructivist activities were in some ways *tacked* on to the more behaviourist ones. Akyeampong et al. (2006) on their part have observed that where constructivist, learner-centred

practices have been embraced, their stay has been short-lived, for ultimately teachers regress to traditional instructional practices. If anything, the evidence suggests that these newer practices are one-off occurrences, exceptions to a rule, the rule being an enduring teacher-centred pedagogy. We are not yet 'beyond the polarization of pedagogy' (Barrett 2007:273), it would seem.

I suggest that the view (espoused by Barrett 2007 and others) of teacher-centred and learner-centred pedagogies as non-contradictory and, therefore, unproblematic emanates from an unconscious adherence to a technicist approach to pedagogy. The approach views teacher-centred and learner-centred pedagogies as lying on a continuum. Figure 1.1 below taken from Bartlett and Cox (1982) is typical of the continuum representation

Figure 1.1 : **The Teaching-learning Continuum**

PUPIL LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Reception learning	Problem solving	Open ended hypothesis testing	Creative activity discovery

INCREASING PUPIL AUTONOMY

Exposition and narration	Provides structure for enquiry and methods of investigation	Provides advice about structure and is available for consultation	Offers encouragement and support, but no direction

TEACHER ACTIVITIES

Source: Bartlett and Cox, 1982.

On the left-hand side of the continuum are teacher and student activities that are associated with the teacher-centred pedagogy while the right-hand side represents the learner-centred pedagogy in which students' autonomy is enhanced. Between the two extreme ends of the continuum is an area where the mixing of the two pedagogies is possible, that is, the area where 'colourful variations' or a 'hybrid' of traditional and new practices can be found. It is in this area that we can locate the studies carried out by Nakabugo and Sieborger (2001), Brodie et al. (2002) and Barrett (2007) mentioned above.

However, there are problems with representing the two pedagogies as lying on a continuum. In the first place, the very concept of 'continuum' in this context is itself problematic – it suggests that the two pedagogies do not differ *fundamentally*. As is clear from the representation in Figure 1.1 above the pedagogies differ mainly in terms of the degree of student autonomy, which autonomy increases as one moves from the teacher-centred side of the continuum to the learner-centred side. Secondly, and following logically from the first assumption, the continuum representation of the pedagogies implicitly suggests that pedagogical reform involves a non-problematic, effortless 'shift' by teachers and students along the continuum from the left-hand side to the right-hand side. This is captured in Nakabugo and Sieborger's (2001) quotation above. Thirdly, the model cannot accommodate a view of pedagogy as value-laden. And following from the latter, context does not matter in pedagogical change. This is the technicist approach I have referred to above. More shall be said about this approach in the remaining sections of the chapter.

Taken together, these assumptions lead to the adoption of a simplistic view of the process of pedagogical change – that resources are sufficient to effect pedagogical reform. Typically, lack of change is rationalized in terms of insufficient time and resources, high teacher-student ratios and defective teacher education programmes resulting in poorly trained teachers. This invariably gives the impression that if resources were made available in relative abundance, pedagogical change would most likely occur in sub-Saharan Africa. Barrett (2007:292), for example, attributes the predominance of teacher-centred approaches to 'economic scarcity, which leads to insufficient preparation, development, supervision and monitoring of teachers as well as working and living conditions that spread demoralization through the teaching force'. More recently even, Altinyelken (2010:168) has attributed the limited presence of child-centred pedagogy in Uganda to a '[l]ack of human and material resources, capacity shortages and shortcomings in curriculum design'. The economic scarcity thesis, while by and large true, is not a sufficient reason for pedagogical reform failure. Take the case of Botswana where resource scarcity, until the advent of the global credit crunch of 2008, was not an acute problem, at least not to the extent it was, and still is, in other parts of Africa. Botswana has been experimenting with learner-centred pedagogy since the early 1980s, far longer than most sub-Saharan African countries. Yet the resilience of teacher-dominated classroom practices is still being reported today. This seems to suggest that perhaps there is more to pedagogical reform than just the (non)-availability of resources.

This emphasis on the primacy of technical issues when attempting to make sense of pedagogical reform is what has been referred to at the beginning of the chapter as the technicist approach. The implicit assumption in the technicist approach seems to be that pedagogical change is mainly a matter of injecting resources in a deficient system. Typically, when change fails to be institutionalized, teachers and/or their conditions of work are blamed. The solution is to pour more resources into the interventionist programmes to help teachers change. If there is still no change, more resources have to be mobilized. This becomes a cycle, with costs escalating with each attempt. This is not to say that technical issues are not important in pedagogical change. They are undoubtedly important, but they are not a sufficient condition for change to take place.

The limitation of the technicist approach to understanding change is that it does not go beyond the technical. Invariably, the remedies recommended also tend to be technical – make more resources available and improve teacher training. We know that the latter is a recurring recommendation in reports on improving teacher quality. We also know that the more we try to improve teacher training along the lines recommended, the less things seem to change. Why then are classroom practices so intractable with respect to reform efforts? I suggest that the intractability of teacher-centred pedagogy derives from a superficial conception of pedagogy and of the process of pedagogical change. Pedagogical change involves more than just the injection of resources into a system that is perceived as deficient. There is need to treat learner-centred and teacher-centred pedagogies themselves as problematic, something that the technicist approach overlooks. These pedagogies have been engendered and are supported by particular contexts. Ignoring these contexts the way the technicist approach does can only lead to a distorted appreciation of the nature of pedagogic change. If context indeed matters, then pedagogical change does not take place in a sociological vacuum. The context in which a particular pedagogy originates acts as the latter's support structure, ensuring in the process the pedagogy's stability, constancy and resilience. Beyond resources, there is need to look deep into the structures that support, for example, teacher-centred pedagogy in the sub-Saharan African context and, by implication, that also repel learner-centredness. A comprehensive theory of pedagogical change would have to acknowledge these structures.

Technical Rationality as an Epistemology of Practice

As pointed out above the technicist approach implies that teaching is a value-free, objective activity whose problems are solvable through the application

of the rigorous procedures of the scientific method. This approach is deeply rooted in technical rationality, an epistemology of practice based on the empiricist/positivist tradition (McNiff 1988; Schon 1987; Smyth 1991). Schon (1987) has this to say about positivism:

> The positivist epistemology of practice rests on three dichotomies. Given the separation of means from ends, instrumental problem solving can be seen as a technical procedure to be measured by its effectiveness in achieving a pre-established objective. Given the separation of research from practice, rigorous practice can be seen as an application of instrumental problems of research-based theories and techniques whose objectivity and generality derive from the method of controlled experiment. Given the separation of knowing from doing, action is only an implementation and a test of technical decision (p. 78).

Elsewhere, Schon (1983:21) refers to technical rationality as the 'view that…. professional activity consists in instrumental problem-solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique'.

Positivism is traceable to the works of Enlightenment thinkers such as René Descartes, Francis Bacon, John Locke, Isaac Newton and others. Interest in science in the seventeenth century did not grow out of sheer curiosity; the interest was political in that the aim was to overthrow the intellectual and cultural fashions of previous centuries (Bowen 2003). For this reason, the second half of the eighteenth century witnessed a number of revolutions – industrial, social and political – that changed the West. So profound was the impact of science that it is claimed:

> 'The scientific milieu in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was dominated in part by Darwinian ideas, deductive approaches, and an acceptance of the concept of Newtonian cause and effect relationships' (Grossman 1977, as cited in Bowen 2005).

Use of the (particularly Newtonian) mechanistic cause and effect paradigm, was extended to the study of almost everything. In science, the paradigm led to the search and subsequent discovery of laws governing the operation of the universe. Emphasis was on formulating theory, that is, 'lawful relationships amongst variables' (Tom 1980:16). The same paradigm, it was surmised, could be employed to discover the laws that governed human society, laying the foundations for the evolution of the discipline of sociology. Even human thinking could be studied scientifically using this paradigm, laying the foundations for psychology, the discipline that has more than any other dominated teacher education. So profound was the influence of this paradigm that it was declared as the ultimate aim of science to construct:

> all of science, including psychology on the basis of physics, so that all theoretical terms are definable by those of physics and laws derivable from those of physics (Rudolph Carnap, as cited in Holt-Jensen 1980:77).

Teaching as professional practice did not escape the influence of the scientific method. In an effort to build what Gage (1978:41) termed a 'scientific basis for the art of teaching', researchers on teaching adopted cause and effect analysis, which analysis in turn gave birth to the process-product paradigm of research on teaching. This conception subsequently led to a flurry of studies seeking law-like relationships between such variables as teacher behaviour and student learning, the so-called 'teacher effectiveness' research. Gage, the representative of this conception, had this to say about the nature of research on teaching:

> Research on teaching is aimed at the identification and measurement of variables in the behavior and characteristics of teachers, at discovering the antecedents or determinants of these central variables, and at revealing the consequences or effect of these variables (Gage 1963:vi cited in Donmoyer 2006:18).

Not only does this conception put the teacher at the centre of the educative enterprise, it also defines the teaching and learning relationship as a cause-and-effect relationship, where the teacher causes some response in the learner. Brophy (1984:91, cited in Pearson 1989:25), in an apparent reference to the then evolving research on teacher effectiveness, stated that:

> For the first time there is available a developing scientific data base . . . about linkages between teacher behavior and student outcome.

From teacher effectiveness research is derived propositional statements about teaching which, if implemented by teachers, will improve the achievement of students (Pearson 1989:24). As Gage (1978:38) states, these statements must be 'relatively specific, objectively observable and require relatively little extrapolation from terminology to what is to be done'. Thus, just as in the physical sciences, teaching and teacher education programmes should be based on facts, not opinions; that is, teaching is a value-neutral activity. The influence of behaviourism (an issue we discuss in Chapter Three) is self-evident in this thinking.

One of the deleterious effects of the technicist approach, with its stress on value-neutrality, is that it tends to ignore the role of agency (e.g. that of teachers) in pedagogical change. In Botswana, for example, the Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation of the Ministry of Education and Skills Development is responsible for developing curricular and teaching strategies, with little input from the practicing teachers (Maruatona 1994). The

role of teachers is simply to adopt and implement pre-packaged, standardized and almost teacher-proof content and teaching strategies 'developed' by bureaucrats. In other words, the teacher's job is that of executing laws and principles of effective teaching (Tom 1980). Because thinking (conception) is removed from implementation (execution), the model of the teacher 'becomes that of the technician or white-collar clerk' (Giroux and McLaren 1986:220). In these circumstances, the ideal model of teaching and learning is one in which learning is the memorization of discrete facts that are easy to measure and evaluate, with lecturing being the most efficient way of covering the prescribed syllabus.

A statement on the metaphor 'teacher-as-technician' is apt here. To the extent that it is about how we see the world, it is 'a compressed, imaginative expression of a perspective' (Boolstrom 1998:397), a metaphor is expressive of a particular perspective on power and power relations. The metaphor 'teacher as technician' makes hierarchical the relationship between the teacher and students, thus implicitly sustaining a teacher-centred approach to teaching and learning, an approach which paradoxically simultaneously deskills teachers. Because of the way in which it hierarchically structures social relations, this model has been termed the 'top-down' model, the 'centre-periphery' model, the 'input-output' model, and what Hoyle (1988) terms the 'maintenance paradigm'. With its emphasis on educational change as a rational technical process, the model typically conceptualizes pedagogical change as a process that is:

> …. initiated at the macro level from a central position and passed down to the micro level of classrooms where deficiencies in curriculum materials can be remedied, which leads to improvement in teachers and teaching styles (Prophet 1995:129).

Thus, in this model of change management, the teacher essentially plays a passive and dependent role and can change his or her practice only by adopting teaching practices and curricula 'mandated by those who are external to the setting in which the teaching is taking place' (Richardson 1994:6).

One other aspect of the technicist approach is that in educational policy making the teacher is often singled out as the most important change agent, to the exclusion of other participants, such as students. Whenever change is thought desirable in educational practice, interventionist programmes are usually established for teachers. Improving the quality of teachers is usually viewed as a prerequisite for quality learning. The role students (the real consumers of curriculum initiatives) play in curriculum implementation is largely viewed as inconsequential. Students are rarely involved in any meaningful way in curriculum decision-making, in spite of the fact that

they are central to the process of schooling. That students are perceived as inconsequential in curriculum matters is also self-evident in the work of classroom researchers, who tend to focus almost exclusively on what the teacher does in class, rather than on what students also do to influence classroom practices. In Chapter Four, I demonstrate the fallacy of this approach.

Finally, on the basis of its value-free assumption, technical rationality holds that there is 'no value conflict and that there are no competing paradigms of practice' (Pearson 1989:28). This position leads to a very important conclusion, that solutions to problems can be standardised. Effectively, this means that since values in professional practice (such as teaching) are out of question, *context* is irrelevant. This point is illustrated by the way learner-centred pedagogy has been portrayed – as a one-size-fits-all pedagogical approach (Reyes 1992), that is, it is universal pedagogy, one that works with equal effectiveness irrespective of the context. However, the pedagogy is value-laden since it expresses a view about the world, about the kind of people and society we want to create through education. This ideological/political nature of the pedagogy is masked by the technicist view. If there are no competing paradigms of practice, and if teacher-centred and learner-centred pedagogies do not represent competing paradigms of teaching, then

it should be possible to present the two as lying on a continuum.

Where context is rendered irrelevant, standardized techniques of solving problems are considered possible. However, since teaching is a value-laden activity, in the words of Crossley and Jarvis (1999), 'context matters', meaning that standardized solutions to problems of teaching and learning are not only undesirable, they are impossible. Neglect of context resulting from the dominance of the technicist approach to pedagogical change might, therefore, be responsible for the failure of the institutionalization of the learner-centred pedagogy and conversely, for the resilience of the teacher-centred pedagogy. No amount of resources will change teaching and learning in sub-Saharan Africa in a significant way when we fail to problematise the context in which the twin processes (of teaching and learning) occur. This calls for a socio-cultural approach to pedagogical change to replace the technicist approach.

Towards a Socio-cultural Approach to Pedagogy

There is a growing dissatisfaction with the technicist approach to pedagogic change. McGrath (2008:3), in an implicit reference to the technicist approach, for example, observes that 'the main approaches taken to teacher

development are failing to deal with the complexity of teachers' knowledge, work and identity and lack sufficient grasp of the nature of change processes and the way that these are mediated by cultural, political and economic environments'. Vavrus (2009) has been bold in attempting to develop a framework she terms the 'cultural politics of pedagogy' in her examination of the multi-faceted environment of teacher education and pedagogical change in Tanzania. The latter attempt is an effort to eschew the technicist approach to pedagogic change by including the 'economic and political dimensions of pedagogical theory and practice in aid-dependent African states' (Vavrus 2009:305). Through this book, I intend contributing to this emerging debate by considering in more detail than has been attempted before the cultural, epistemological, political, economic, social and religious bases of pedagogical practice, not only in aid-dependent Africa but Africa as a whole.

A socio-cultural approach takes off from the basic premise that teaching is inherently value-laden and context-specific, that is, teaching does not take place in a sociological vacuum. Teaching shapes and is shaped by the social, cultural, historical, political and economic contexts within which it occurs. No two contexts can be exactly the same. By the same logic, teaching can never be exactly the same across contexts. While it is possible to identify 'constants' in teaching, these must be understood as tentative, that is, subject to change as and when the context changes. Pedagogical approaches such as learner-centred and teacher-centred approaches have social origins and are, therefore, socially grounded. This position puts the basic premises of technical rationality on their head. First, contrary to the logic of technical rationality, a socio-cultural approach presents pedagogical styles (teacher-centred pedagogy (TCP) and learner-centred-pedagogy (LCP) as problematic and representing competing paradigms of practice. Not only are they grounded in radically different epistemological foundations, they are also supported by different structures in the contexts in which they find expression. Thus, TCP and LCP are fundamentally different pedagogical styles, in fact, paradigms. Following from the above, their transfer from one context to another is problematic. These two repudiations of the technicist approach imply that there can never be a one-size-fits-all pedagogical style. In short, a socio-cultural approach (a) problematises the pedagogical styles themselves; they are not taken for granted as is the case in the technicist approach; (b) problematises the transfer of pedagogies from one context to another; and (c) takes seriously the influence of the wider enveloping social structure in its attempt to explain the shape teaching and learning take in any context.

Tissue Rejection: An Analytical Tool

> A basic problem in educational change is that of 'tissue rejection' whereby an innovation . . . does not become an effectively functioning part of the system (Hoyle 1970:2).

Another way of appreciating the significance of context in teaching and learning is to use the medical metaphors of 'tissue rejection' and 'immunological condition' (Hoyle 1969). Tissue rejection refers to the rejection of a transplanted organ by its host because of the latter's immunological condition. A transplanted heart, for example, may be rejected by the patient's body because it does not fit well in the latter's immunological state. It makes no sense to attempt an organ transplant on a body whose immunological condition is not designed to accommodate the organ. If the immunological condition did not matter, it would be possible to transplant any organ to any body without regard to the latter's condition. Applied to educational settings, Hoyle (1969) argues that tissue rejection occurs when there is a discrepancy or incongruence between the innovation and the 'pedagogical code' of the school, and I would add, of the enveloping social structure. The implanted innovation is rejected by the host environment (e.g. the school/society) because it is incompatible with the latter's values and past experience. Hoyle observes that many current innovations (e.g. learner-centred pedagogy) are underpinned by a 'code' which is radically new as far as the adopting unit is concerned. In the case of learner-centred pedagogy, this code places emphasis on classroom openness, flexibility and learner empowerment. The 'message' carried by this pedagogical code may require a switch in code on the part of the host. It is at this juncture that the fate of the innovation is decided. Where this code is already shifting towards classroom openness, for example, support for an innovation carrying a 'radical' message is likely to be forthcoming. On the relationship between innovations and social structure, Hoyle and Bell (1972:19) say that, 'An innovation will diffuse through a social structure if it is congruent with the central values obtaining in that structure'. In such a case, the institutionalization of an innovation underpinned by the openness code will be relatively easy to accomplish. On the other hand, where this code is not shifting, or is shifting, but in the opposite direction, institutionalization becomes difficult, and the innovation is rejected. In short, it is necessary to evaluate not only the context in which pedagogy is being introduced but also the nature of the pedagogy itself to establish its fit or lack thereof with its 'host' context. Such an approach is a world apart from the technicist one.

Conclusion

The main conclusion to be reached from the above is that adoption, implementation and institutionalization of pedagogy would be greatly facilitated by a social structure whose code is compatible with that of the innovation. This calls for an approach to pedagogic change that not only accommodates analysis of the enveloping structure to determine the latter's 'readiness' for the proposed pedagogic innovation, but also one that treats the pedagogy being introduced as problematic. The technicist approach, as argued above, has no room for this. Certain features (e.g. child-rearing practices) of the social structure may act as support structures for the sustenance of a particular form of pedagogy. Thus, to understand the resilience of TCP in the sub-Saharan African context we need to isolate and then analyse the structures that support it. Conversely, to understand the tissue rejection being suffered by LCP, it is necessary to analyse the code that it embeds and judge its fit with the host context.

It is precisely these two concerns that are the focus of the remaining chapters of the book. The next chapter looks at what I consider to be the 'true' rationale for introducing LCP in sub-Saharan Africa. The rationale is a politico-economic one. I treat the rationale as problematic in its own right since it cannot be expected to appeal to sub-Saharan Africa teachers, students and education administrators whose preoccupation is improving the test/ examination scores of their students, not imbuing learners with the skills and attitudes needed to navigate today's political and economic world. To mask its ideological nature, sponsors of LCP in sub-Saharan Africa initially presented it as a one-size-fits-all pedagogical approach, a universal pedagogy that had no respect for context. Its technicist nature, combined with its irrelevance to the tasks of teachers and students in sub-Saharan Africa, render the pedagogy 'uninstitutionalisable' in the sub-region.