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Why Learner-centred Pedagogy in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Introduction

The rationale advanced in this chapter for contemporary interest in learner-centred education is very different from the one often advanced by proponents of the pedagogy, mainly that learner-centred pedagogy improves the ‘quality’ of teaching and learning. The proponents rarely unpack the concept of ‘quality teaching and learning’ – despite the fact that ‘quality’ is a contentious concept (see Barrett et al. 2006) – but for us to appreciate it better, they give us occasional glimpses of what they understand by quality in this context. Tabulawa (2003) and Vavrus (2009) surmise that contemporary interest in pedagogical reform in sub-Saharan Africa is largely based on economic and political rationales – the need to improve the sub-region’s human capital base as a way of stimulating economic growth and the West’s desire to globalise a liberal democratic ethos. In this context, Vavrus (2009:304) concludes that ‘quality’ ‘means constructivist approaches to teaching that privilege active, inquiry-based learning and student-centred teaching’. In other words, although the efficacy of the pedagogy is often couched in cognitive/educational terms, in essence, its perceived efficacy lies in its political and economic nature. On the basis of this understanding of quality teaching and learning teachers are told that their students’ performance will improve if they adopt this form of teaching.

However, this often unstated rationale for the constructivist learner-centred pedagogy might in fact be contributing to the failure of pedagogical reform in sub-Saharan Africa. Political/economic rationales for the pedagogy can only promote a technical understanding of teaching. Furthermore, the rationales

have very little relationship with student performance *as understood* by teachers in sub-Saharan Africa (where 'quality' is understood predominantly in terms of student performance in tests and examinations). Pedagogical innovations whose utility in this regard is not obvious to teachers and students are unlikely to be embraced. The perceived utility of an innovation has implications for how it is received in its host environment. Teachers and students in the sub-Saharan African context are mostly likely to evaluate the utility value of a pedagogical innovation in terms of whether it is likely to enhance students' performance in tests and examinations, not in terms of whether it is likely to produce students with the character traits preferred for contemporary political life and the economy. Would teachers and students be ready to adopt and implement a pedagogy that has no apparent and immediate utility value to them? In the context of Africa, the answer is a clear 'No'. Thus, the very rationale for the learner-centred pedagogy might be its Achilles' heel. If this argument is admissible, then the pedagogy must be treated as problematic, instead of assuming, as the technicist approach does, that it is only technical issues to do with the innovation delivery system that matter.

The economic/political rationale for the constructivist, learner-centred pedagogy cannot be appreciated without first recognizing the role of international aid agencies in its propagation. The fact that these agencies' interest in the pedagogy intensified after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 is in itself significant. The apparent 'lack' of interest in the pedagogy before 1989 may be attributed to the very central hypothesis of the modernization theory of development which became enshrined in policies of aid agencies soon after the latter were created. The hypothesis, coupled with human capital theory, viewed education in technicist terms. However, the ascendancy of neo-liberalism as a development paradigm in the 1980s and 1990s elevated political democratization as a prerequisite for economic development. Education, then, assumed a central role in the democratization project. Given its democratic tendencies, learner-centred pedagogy was a natural choice for the development of democratic social relations in the schools of aid-receiving countries, the majority of which are in sub-Saharan Africa. International aid agencies, now operating in a unipolar, geopolitical environment, could afford to be explicit about their preference for the pedagogy. Therefore, besides being an import, learner-centred pedagogy is a worldview intended to develop a preferred kind of society and people. In short, the pedagogy in sub-Saharan Africa is significant less for its educational/cognitive value than for its political and economic utility. However, the latter is of little interest to teachers and students.

Why Learner-centred Pedagogy now?

Answering this question is a prerequisite for an understanding of the pervasiveness of the learner-centred pedagogy. Is it not intriguing that the surge in interest in the pedagogy coincided with a political development of global significance, being the fall of the Berlin Wall, with all that it symbolized – the end of the bipolar world order? Is it not intriguing that the pedagogy has been sponsored and popularized by international agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a role that they started playing much more actively and boldly soon after the demise of the Soviet Union? Is it not also interesting that in countries such as South Africa and Namibia, learner-centred pedagogy assumed prominence with the countries' attainment of political independence?

Justification for adopting the learner-centred pedagogy is usually expressed by the aid agencies in benign and apolitical terms. For example, the justification is often couched in educational and cognitive terms, such as 'the pedagogy leads to improvements in learning outcomes' and that it is 'more effective'. Pertinent questions, such as 'what learning outcomes?' and 'effectiveness for what?', are rarely posed or addressed. Also rarely questioned is the assumption of equating change in the quality of teaching with change in teaching styles, especially with the constructivist, learner-centred pedagogy. Guthrie (1980) argues that there is no causal relationship between the two and that, to date, there is no study that has conclusively established that learner-centredness is necessarily superior to traditional teaching in Third World countries in terms of improving students' achievement in test scores. In his comparative study of progressive and non-progressive methods, Anthony (1979:180) concluded that 'progressive methods are not generally superior to non-progressive methods for the teaching of reading and English, and that progressive methods are generally inferior to non-progressive methods for the teaching of arithmetic'. On his part, Bennett (1976) in his seminal study, *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress*, argued against the permissive classroom atmosphere in progressive schools, calling for more teacher direction and clear sequencing and structuring of learning experiences.

There seems to be unanimity among both international aid agencies and educational researchers that learner-centred education can be effective in inculcating 'affective, moral and philosophical values about desirable psychosociological traits for individuals and for society' (Guthrie 1990:222). What character traits or attributes are these and where do they come from? The traits include creativity, versatility, innovativeness, critical thinking, problem solving,

tolerance of divergent views and independence of thought. Constructivist, learner-centred approaches are seen as the appropriate approaches to deliver these character traits. In this discourse, 'quality' teaching is defined as teaching that adopts constructivist approaches 'that privilege active, inquiry-based learning and student-centred teaching' (Vavrus 2009:304). Privileging these attributes can be traced to political and economic developments since 1989. This is not to suggest that before the fall of the Berlin Wall these attributes were not considered important to the education enterprise. On the contrary, the Progressive Education Movement of the 1960s and 1970s purported to promote these qualities in learners (Silcock 1996:200). Partly because of the bipolar, global geopolitical configuration of the pre-1990s, the West and international aid agencies were constrained to openly associate education (and by extension, learner-centred pedagogy) with the imperatives of political democratization and promotion of free-market economy. The collapse of the Soviet Union (symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall), leading to a unipolar world order (dominated by the United States of America), emboldened the West and international aid agencies to publicly declare their preference and support for Western liberal democracy and the free-market economy, and together with these, education that promoted character traits congenial to both democratization and the free-market economy. The position of aid agencies on this matter has been summarized by Burnell (1991:7):

[T]he ascendant assumption now seems to be that political pluralism is essential for development. Put another way, a movement towards greater political accountability will enable a robust and free-market economy to flourish.

'Political pluralism' in effect refers to 'liberal democracy' and 'free-market economy' to 'competitive capitalism'. Thus the promotion of liberal democracy is necessarily the promotion of competitive capitalism, as far as aid agencies are concerned. For the agencies, economic development is perceived as only possible under liberal democracy, so that promoting the latter should be a priority for any country serious about development. It is, therefore, not surprising that aid agencies have made the adoption of multi-party democracy by aid-receiving countries a condition for giving aid. This condition was integrated in the structural adjustment programmes that many sub-Saharan Africa have endured since the 1980s.

The aid agencies have cited the democratisation of education as one of the most important ways of promoting liberal democracy at the macro level. For example, consider the following policy statements from the bilateral aid agencies of the United Kingdom (UK) and Norway. In the UK, the Overseas

Development Administration (ODA) and its successor, the Department for International Development (DfID) have stated clear positions:

Citizens who have been exposed to learning styles which require the questioning of assumptions, empirical styles of studying and the exploration of alternatives are seen as likely to have more chance of participating fruitfully in a pluralistic political process than those who have not. (Overseas Development Administration 1994:3)

The relationship between education and the political process is well illustrated in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, where the process of democratisation is seen to be hampered by outdated curricula and teaching methods (Department for International Development 1997:7).

In Norway, the position has been illustrated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

For the growth and consolidation of a democratic system, it is important that the attitudes and values of such a system, like respect for human rights, should be expressed and reflected in different contexts. For example, in the educational system information about democracy and human rights needs to be imparted from the elementary level onwards (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1993:19).

Similar statements have also been made by other bilateral aid agencies in the USA, Canada and Denmark. All the statements stress the perceived significance of the relationship between education and politics, specifically that education has the potential to contribute significantly towards the democratisation process. As Harber (1997:22) has noted in the African context:

Western governments and aid agencies not only seem, in principle at least, to favour democratisation of African political systems, they also see education playing an important part in the process.

Often singled out (as in the UK statements above) as the nexus between education and the broader principles of democracy and economic development is the learner-centred pedagogy. That this should be the case is not surprising, as Shukla (1994:11) observes: '*[D]emocracy in relation to education cannot but be an extension of child-centred-ness (paedocentrism) to the social dimension*'. Likewise, the desirability of learner-centred pedagogy today is couched in the discourse of international economic competitiveness (Tabulawa 2009). Thus, since 1989, there has been a tightening of the relationship between politics and economics, leading to a politico-economic theory i.e. neo-liberalism, which development aid has since enshrined in its programmes, including development aid to education. Neo-liberalism is delivered in sub-

Saharan African countries by aid agencies through educational projects and consultancies funded by the aid agencies, and learner-centred pedagogy forms the nexus between neo-liberalism and education. In Botswana, this pedagogy was heavily emphasised in both the Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP; 1981-1991) and the Junior Secondary Education Improvement Project (JSEIP). These projects were largely financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In Uganda, learner-centred pedagogy was promoted by, among others, the Aga Khan Foundation and USAID (Altinyelken 2010). In Tanzania it was the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank through the Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP) (Vavrus 2009), while in Malawi the international agendas of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been the main carriers of the pedagogy (Mtika and Gates 2010).

It is important to appreciate, though, that interest in the learner-centred pedagogy is not a twentieth-century phenomenon. It arose in the context of the so-called Enlightenment or Age of Reason, an era in which the desire to reconstruct society was evident – a project in which education was expected to play a pivotal role. By turning to science and the scientific method (the latter defined as ‘a systematic and careful way of observing natural phenomena’ (Gutek 2005:136), Enlightenment theorists sought to turn the supernatural order upside down. By turning to nature for lessons on how to organize society, these thinkers were challenging divine authority; and emphasis on the natural propensities of the child was an attack on the notion of original sin. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s theorization (as discussed in Chapter Three) on education not only called for a new social order, it also specifically called for the construction of an egalitarian and democratic society. The association of the learner-centred pedagogy with democratization is a theme that has continued to reverberate around the world, lately with renewed fervour. The pedagogy is a view about the world, about the kind of people and society we want to create through education. However, this political/ideological nature of the pedagogy is often not recognised. This is because it is often presented as if it were value-free and merely technical. Its implementation is often informed by the ideology of technical rationality with its stress on value neutrality (Tabulawa 1998). This explains why it is often presented as a one-size-fits-all pedagogical approach (Reyes 1992), that is, it is a universal pedagogy, one that works with equal effectiveness irrespective of the context. It is this technicist view of the pedagogy that masks its ideological/political nature.

Contrary to justifications of the learner-centred pedagogy based on educational grounds, the interest of aid agencies in the pedagogy is part of a wider design on the part of international aid institutions to facilitate the penetration of capitalist ideology in periphery states, this being done under the guise of democratisation. Adopting a world systems approach, I argue that the hidden agenda is to alter the 'modes of thought' and practices of those in periphery states so that they look at reality in the same way(s) as those in core states. This process is being accelerated by the current wave of globalisation, which is a carrier of conservative, neo-liberal ideology.

Aid to Education from a World Systems Approach

The world systems approach conceptualises the contemporary world as integrated but dominated by the capitalist economic system of the USA, Western Europe and Japan (Clayton 1998). These countries constitute the 'core' zone and are characterised by a higher level of industrialisation, while the less industrialised nations of the world constitute the 'periphery' zone (Wallerstein 1984). The two zones are characterised by unequal economic and power relations. The world economy differentially rewards these zones, with a disproportionate flow of surplus to the core zone. In addition to supporting the dominant (capitalist) classes (oriented towards the world market), the economic structure of each zone also supports states which operate in the interests of those classes. These states tend to be weaker in the periphery and stronger in the core zone of the world system. As Stocpol (1977:1077) states:

the differential strength of the multiple states within the world capitalist economy is crucial for maintaining the system as a whole, for the strong states reinforce and increase the differential flow of surplus to the core zones.

Stronger states assist their dominant (capitalist) classes to manipulate and enforce terms of trade in their favour in the world market. This ensures the exploitation of periphery states.

However, the privileged position in the world system of core states cannot be guaranteed, for their relations with periphery states are dynamic. Thus unlike dependency theorists, who tended to adopt a deterministic stance on the issue of core-periphery relationship, world system theorists do not regard periphery states as doomed to their subordinate position in global power relations. This fact alone means that there is tension between the two zones, and the privileged zone would naturally want to perpetuate and preserve the status quo. In the past (for example, during colonial conquest) this tension

would manifest itself in open warfare (Magdoff 1982). Today the preferred means of legitimising global power relations is through the inculcation of what Wallerstein (1984:117) terms 'modes of thought and analysis'. Largely used to carry out this function are aid agencies. Through the aid agencies, core states use their funds in 'many different ways to promote their versions of Third World improvement' (King 1991:25), and one of those versions is that of a capitalist South. This is least surprising since the agencies are 'dominated by capitalist ideologies' (Bray 1984:13). Their aid, which comes in the form of grants, loans, equipment and personnel, promotes the conditions necessary for the reproduction of capitalism (Hayter 1971).

Education as the 'dominant Ideological State Apparatus' (Althusser 1971) is a tool used by core states to disseminate those ideologies supportive of their interests. After all, education is a political and moral activity and, by its very nature, embodies cultures and ideologies (Ginsburg *et al.* 1992). It can, therefore, be used to transmit modes of thought and practice. Development aid agencies are particularly well placed to transfer these cultures and ideologies from core to periphery states. Education aid, just like all foreign aid, 'represents a transfer not only of resources and technologies, but of culture and values as well' (Stokke 1995:21). Clayton (1998) conceptualises the effects of educational assistance to periphery states in terms of its ideological effects which take place through what Samoff (1993) terms 'intellectual socialization'. This form of socialisation takes place through being taught by 'core' teachers, attending core institutions, and through reading books and curricular materials produced by core enterprises. All these are imbued with core values, ideas, and structures' (Clayton 1998:151). Teaching methods (such as learner-centredness) transferred from core to periphery states also transmit a way of thinking, or what Bourdieu (1971) terms 'habit of thought'. Some of the central values learner-centredness purports to promote are individual autonomy, open-mindedness and tolerance for alternative viewpoints. All these are in line with the individualistic Western culture and are also character traits deemed necessary for an individual to survive in a pluralistic, liberal democratic, capitalist society. Thus, by purporting to promote democracy, learner-centredness invariably promotes the reproduction of capitalism in periphery states. It is, therefore, not surprising that aid agencies have shown so much interest in the pedagogy. However, it should be recognised that learner-centredness relates to capitalism in an indirect and non-causal way.

To appreciate the interest of aid agencies in the learner-centred pedagogy, it is important to look at how ideas about development have changed since

the emergence of development aid in the late 1940s to the point where democratisation is now viewed as a condition for economic growth. This helps to put aid agencies' current interest in the learner-centred pedagogy in perspective. More specifically, the historical perspective shows how capitalist democracy (as an ideology as well as a political-economic system) permeated and became enshrined in the policies of aid agencies when the latter emerged in the 1940s and 1950s. However, it was during the 1980s that the aid agencies' interest in liberal democracy, and consequently in the learner-centred pedagogy, became explicit. Before looking at the changes that have occurred in ideas about development, the democracy-capitalism nexus must be explained.

Liberal Democracy and Capitalism: The (In)separable Marriage?

There is a general misconception that the association of economic development with liberal democracy is a post-1989 phenomenon. On the contrary, this view of the inseparability of development (here understood as the spread of the free-market economic system) and political pluralism (liberal democracy) now enshrined in aid agency policies has a history far older than that of the aid agencies themselves. There is unanimity among scholars of liberal democracy that the latter emerged in the wake of capitalism, and that there is concordance between the two. However, there is less agreement on the question of how liberal democracy evolved from capitalism. Those in the neo-liberal camp (such as Lipset 1959; Friedman 1962) aver that capitalism produced a complex and differentiated economy. This in turn produced a 'complex and differentiated political system where there [were] multiple centers of power' (Dryzek 1996:25). Decentralised power is conducive to liberal democracy. For Lipset (1959), capitalist prosperity increased the size of the middle class – that class committed to liberal virtues. Thus, it was the capitalists themselves who produced democracy because they wanted it. So, capitalism is inseparable from liberal democracy, a point emphatically stated by Friedman (1962:8) who asserts that there exists an intimate connection between economics and politics, that only certain combinations of political and economic arrangements are possible, and that in particular, a society that is socialist cannot be democratic, in the sense of guaranteeing individual freedom.

This liberal version of history is vehemently contested by radical historians/scholars (such as Macpherson 1973; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992; Boron 1995; Dryzek 1996). While these scholars agree that liberal democracy was born in

the wake of capitalism, they however oppose the view that it was the emerging capitalist class that ensured the 'flourishing' of democracy. Boron (1995), for example, argues that capitalism led to liberalism and the emergence of a working class. It did not lead to democracy. The latter only emerged as a result of the actions of the almost disenfranchised working class. It was the plight of this class that precipitated 'popular mobilizations and workers' struggles' (Boron 1995:11) which gave birth to liberal democracy. Otherwise, he argues, the American and the French revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would have easily 'crystallized as sheer oligarchical domination barely disguised under some restricted liberal institutions...." (Boron 1995:11). Thus, democracy and capitalism are inherently antagonistic to each other. As long as capitalism thrives, there will always be a working class which has more to gain from democracy, and will always push for democratisation (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). In effect, capitalist development necessarily entails a curtailment of political freedom.

This debate notwithstanding, the view of the inseparability of capitalism as an economic system and liberal democracy as a form of political organisation has always been ascendant in much of the capitalist world. With the demise of communism in 1989, the legitimacy of this view has gained even greater credibility in the West.

When they emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s, aid institutions (the World Bank, IMF, United Nations organisations, and bilateral agencies) were informed by the modernisation theory of development – a theory that implicitly celebrated the inseparability of liberal democracy and capitalism.

The Modernisation Paradigm: 1950-1980

Capitalist democracy as both an ideology and a political-economic system formally entered the global stage in the 1950s and 1960s. These decades witnessed the formulation by US social scientists of the modernisation paradigm. This paradigm was subsequently 'enshrined in the policy of the US Government and multilateral aid agencies' (Dryzek 1996:18). The modernisation paradigm of development was closely associated with Rostow's (1960) stages of economic growth. Rostow's 'non-communist manifesto' held that the stages of economic growth would 'culminate in a liberal capitalist economic system with the political characteristics of the Western democracies' (Dryzek 1996:18). It was thus a re-statement of the inseparability of capitalism and liberal democracy thesis. The implication of this was clear: societies that needed to develop could follow the core nations

of Europe, America and Japan as models. Third World countries, as Peet (1991:33) states, could,

‘encourage the diffusion of innovation from the centre [Euro-America and Japan], [could] adopt capitalism as the mode of social integration and [could] welcome United States aid and direction’.

That the modernisation theory of development was Eurocentric is beyond doubt. The theory’s basic assumption was that the West’s experience with development was the norm for historical progress and had to be emulated by the rest of the world, not least by developing countries. With its basis in structural functionalism, modernisation theory stated that for Third World countries to modernize, they needed to erode and break old social, economic and psychological commitments. This could be done by introducing structures of capitalism into those countries. Western education (as one of the structures of capitalism) in periphery states was aimed at eroding traditional modes of thought. It was envisaged that economic growth in developing countries would ultimately lead to a more differentiated political system (liberal democracy) in those countries.

Much of development aid to developing countries until the 1980s was underpinned by this belief, although this ideological and political mission of aid was rarely explicitly expressed. It is this belief and its implicit nature that explains why until the 1990s, aid agencies and multilateral institutions extended aid even to some of the most brutal and authoritarian regimes in the world (such as Chile and Malawi) without conditions. Of course there were many instances when such regimes were sustained by core states because of their strategic location as buffers to the spread of communism. However, on the whole, development aid was premised on a basic hypothesis of the modernisation theory of development – that economic growth (that is, the spread of capitalism) moves authoritarian regimes towards liberal democratic values. For this reason, political conditionalities were unnecessary.

We can now understand why Western governments and aid agencies could stand tall and argue that their assistance was benign, philanthropic and politically neutral – because they did not explicitly prescribe any favoured political system (such as liberal democracy) to the recipients of aid. After all, this political system would emerge automatically once the structures of capitalism had been introduced. Thus, underpinning the modernisation theory of development enshrined in the policies of aid agencies was an ideology – capitalist democracy.

Educational Aid and the Modernisation Project

Education occupied a special position in the modernisation project. As an agent of social change, education was expected to promote 'individual modernity', defined as the 'process by which individuals supposedly change from a traditional way of life to a rapidly changing, technological way of life' (Gottlieb 2000:161). At its conception, educational aid to periphery states was based on this perspective. In those states, Western education was expected to erode old social and psychological commitments. It was expected to produce educated elites with Western values and entrepreneurial attitudes. These elites would then lead their states on the path to modernity.

Thus, just like 'development', education was viewed as a technical undertaking. This technicist view of education was accentuated by human capital theory which, 'more than any other theoretical construct, had a profound influence on concepts of the place of education in Third World modernisation and development' (Gottlieb 2000:161). Woodhall (1985:2312) defines human capital as the investment human beings make in themselves 'by means of education, training, or other activities, which raises their future income by raising their lifetime earnings'. The central tenet of human capital theory is that educated individuals are more economically productive than less educated ones. Studies of the economics of education mushroomed in the 1960s and 1970s. These studies concentrated on both the social and private rate of returns to educational investment (Psacharopoulos 1981).

This view of education was subsequently adopted by multilateral and bilateral aid agencies such as the World Bank. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for example, was unequivocal in its approval of human capital theory:

The development of contemporary economies depends crucially on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of their workers – in short on human capital. In many respects, human capital has become even more important in recent years (OECD 1987:69).

The pedagogical implications of human capital theory have been analysed by Baptiste (2001). After a lengthy interrogation of the basic assumptions of the theory, Baptiste reaches the conclusion that individuals described in human capital theory resemble what he terms 'lone wolves' (Baptiste 2001:196). The kind of education that suits these 'lone wolves' would be 'apolitical, adaptive, and individualistic' (Baptiste 2001:198). Pedagogically, educational activities of lone wolves are determined by 'technical considerations . . . rather than

by any ethical or moral philosophy of the educator or program' (Baptiste 2001:196); being adaptive, lone wolves are mechanical beings who are only spectators in their universe; and, being rugged individuals, as learners they lack a collective purpose. Being wedded to the view of education as apolitical, adaptive and individualistic (in short, to human capital theory), it could hardly be expected that aid agencies would show much interest in pedagogical matters. The technicist view of education treats pedagogy as value-neutral and, thus, non-problematic (Tabulawa 1997).

However, the aid agencies view of pedagogy as benign and apolitical was to change in the early 1980s with the rise of neo-liberalism in the West, displacing the modernisation theory of development. This paradigm shift led to a re-conceptualisation of education in the service of the economy. All aspects of education, from curricular content to classroom practices, were affected. In the section that follows, I account for the rise of neo-liberalism (free-market capitalism), its impact on the role of education in economic development in periphery states, and how it ultimately helped to shape the pedagogical orientation of aid agencies thereby leading to their current interest in learner-centred pedagogy. Explication of these developments will demonstrate that 'educational practice is profoundly influenced by theories of human and social behaviour' (Baptiste 2001:184) and that teaching is inherently a political and value-based activity.

The 1980s: A Shift in Emphasis

In the 1970s, the modernisation theory of development came under attack from dependency and world systems theorists. Although in academic circles dependency and world systems theories seemed to displace modernisation theory, in aid agencies the displacer was neo-liberalism, first introduced in the domestic policies of core states in the late 1970s. To justify their policies theoretically, aid agencies turned away from development sociology to neo-classical economics, particularly monetarism. This paradigm shift was to have a profound impact on how aid agencies presented themselves as it, in practice, required them to be explicit about development aid's political and ideological mission. It also led to a re-conceptualisation of the role of education in the development of periphery states. It is thus important to look in more detail at how this occurred.

In the economic and political spheres, the 1970s witnessed two very significant events: (i) an enduring economic recession which in itself was an indictment of the Keynesian economics that underpinned welfare state

capitalism; and (ii) the rise of neo-conservative governments in the USA (the Reagan administration), Britain (the Thatcher government) and Germany (the Kohl government) which presided over the demise of communism, symbolised by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. These events are largely responsible for the current dominant view among Western aid agencies that political pluralism (liberal democracy) is a necessary condition for economic development. It is, therefore, not surprising that democratisation should have such a high priority on the educational agenda of aid institutions for periphery states. The basic premise is that learner-centred pedagogy will promote democracy, a necessary condition for the development of a free-market economy. Thus, learner-centred pedagogy is perceived as conducive to capitalism although, as already indicated, the relationship between the two is an indirect one.

The Economic Crisis of the 1970s

The severity of this economic crisis prompted some (for example, Gamble and Walton 1976) to talk of a 'crisis of capitalism'. The crisis led to hyper-inflation and stagnation in production. It also led to high and rising unemployment. To many neo-liberals it soon became clear that the capitalist system needed re-ordering. The 'answer' to the crisis was to be found in the works of neo-liberal economists, amongst them Friedman, the winner of the 1976 Nobel Prize in Economics, and Hayek, whose writings influenced the policies of the New Right in Britain. Friedman's views deserve some detailed consideration here because his influence is so far unsurpassed and has penetrated every part of the globe, mainly because his economic formulations have, by and large, been adopted by core states and multilateral aid agencies. The same formulations have subsequently been thrust upon periphery states.

Friedman saw the economic crisis as resulting from state interference in the economic arena, which in turn tended to stifle the 'creative and liberating potential of the market' (Boron 1995:33). The only way out of the crisis, in Friedman's view, was through monetarism:

an economic policy which sees the control of the money supply as crucial to the control of inflation and which, by implication, condemns government attempts to regulate the economy through public spending...' (Scruton 1982:304)

In short, Friedman wanted drastic cuts in government spending and the promotion of private enterprise. This would involve the removal of government subsidies, dismantling the welfare system and privatizing state-

owned enterprises, all of which had characterised the 'Keynesian consensus' of the post-1945 period. These ideas coincided with the rise of neo-conservative governments in the USA and Britain which, desperate for a solution to the economic crisis, took some of Friedman's ideas on board. As Boron (1995:34) states:

...Friedman's ideas are at the core of the prevailing neo-liberal orthodoxy and have been the rationalizing principles of the neo-conservative governments all around the world.

My interest in Friedman's theory is that not only is it an economic theory, it is a political theory as well. This is one reason why it was so appealing to neo-conservative governments. The notion of the 'market' is central in Friedman's political and economic formulation. In his view, the market involves voluntary co-operation among individuals. It has two qualities: it resonates with (i) the idea of no government interference; and, resulting from this, (ii) individual autonomy. Friedman sets the market against the state, treating the two as inherently antagonistic. The state represents coercion and authoritarianism, while the market is the cradle of freedom and democracy (Boron 1995). So where the state is heavily involved in economic activities, there cannot be talk of individual autonomy and freedom. Not only is the market important for good economic performance, it is also at the same time the 'fundamental sanctuary that preserves economic and political freedoms' (Boron 1995:36). Thus, freedom can only be defined in terms of the struggle between the state and the market. The latter is about competition, and this competition impacts positively on the state and democracy. The dominance of the market necessarily ensures contraction of state activities in the economy, in itself a desirable situation in Friedman's view. Furthermore, since the market limits the expansion of the state, a situation is avoided where political power is concentrated in a few hands. Devolved political power favours liberal democracy. In this way, without a market and free-market enterprise, there cannot be liberal democracy, nor can a free-market system thrive where there is no liberal democracy. This is a re-statement of the inseparability of capitalism and democracy thesis, whose origins, as we saw earlier on in the paper, are to be found in eighteenth-century liberalism.

This synopsis of Friedman's political/economic theory identifies the ideological nature of the theory. It must be inferred, too, that socialism, because it is the antithesis of free-market enterprise, cannot be democratic. Only competitive capitalism is compatible with political freedom/liberal democracy. Friedman (1962) himself is frank about it:

...the kind of economic organization that provides economic freedom directly, namely, competitive capitalism, also promotes political freedom because it separates economic power from political power and in this way enables the one to offset the other (Friedman 1962:9).

When this reasoning is followed to its logical conclusion:

[D]emocracy simply becomes the political organization proper of capitalism – competitive ex definition – and capitalism is posited as the sole structural support congruent with the specific needs of a democratic state (Boron 1995:6).

Thus, free-market capitalism and liberal democracy are two sides of the same coin; you cannot advocate one without necessarily advocating the other.

The Rise of Neo-Conservative Governments in the West

It is clear from the above that the apparent failure of Keynesianism in the 1970s set the stage for the revival of neo-classical economics. This revival coincided with the rise of neo-conservative governments in the West. These were the years when the Thatcher government, the Reagan administration and the Kohl government swept into power in Britain, the USA and Germany respectively. No sooner had these neo-conservative governments come into office than they started administering Friedman's prescriptions (albeit modified) to their ailing economies. International aid agencies under the control of the West, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, followed suit. The Reagan administration and the Thatcher government spearheaded economic deregulation and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, thereby limiting the role of the state in direct economic activity. These economic reforms were subsequently thrust upon periphery states by core governments and aid agencies.

Periphery states since the early 1980s have been told to cut government spending if they wish to foster economic growth. Under Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) these states are told to remove subsidies on essentials (a very bitter pill often accompanied by riots) and to privatise public-owned enterprises. In short, they are being pressurised to adopt the free-market system of competitive capitalism. Simultaneously, periphery states are told to democratise, that is, to adopt liberal democracy. This is made a condition for foreign aid. The assumption is that efforts to implement a free-market economic system would not yield the desired results where there is no liberal democracy. This contrasts with the earlier view informed by modernisation theory that economic growth (i.e. the spread of capitalism) in periphery states would ultimately yield democracy.

This paradigm shift, as already indicated, resulted from the ascendancy of the political theory of monetarism as well as the demise of communism in 1989. The latter event signaled the end of the 'bipolar international system which had dominated international relations and world politics since World War II' (Stokke 1995:9). This has led to the much discussed 'New World Order'. This is a world order in which Western governments now feel freer than ever before to pursue their political concerns in relation to periphery states. The political norms and interests being pursued by core governments relate to governmental organisation and economic concerns, that is, democratisation and the adoption of free-market economics. Thus behind the clarion call for democracy in periphery states by core states and aid agencies is the ideology of market capitalism. Nevertheless, in general, free-market capitalism is not really penetrating the developing world in accord with the Western model.

Education and Democratisation in Periphery States

It was inevitable that education in periphery states would be affected by all these economic and political changes. With emphasis now on political democratisation in periphery states, education as the dominant ideological state apparatus has a significant role in the process. Its mandate has been expanded. Whereas in the past education in periphery states largely focused on inculcating the skills, attitudes and knowledge deemed necessary for economic development, today it has the additional task of promoting the neo-liberal version of democracy. For this to be achieved, schools themselves are expected to be democratic communities if learners and their teachers are to 'acquire those qualities of mind and social attitudes which are the prerequisites of a genuinely democratic society' (Carr 1991:185). In periphery states, this democratic ethos can only be developed if schools function in 'ways which challenge the conformism of students and teachers and the society around them' (Meyer-Bisch 1995:15). The authoritarian climate of classrooms of Third World schools is seen as inimical to the development of liberal democracy. For democratic social relations to be promoted in the classroom, democratic teaching methods have to be employed. Because it is 'more democratic than authoritarian teaching' (Baker 1998:173), the learner-centred pedagogy emerges as the natural choice for the cultivation and inculcation of a liberal democratic ethos.

We can now appreciate why aid agencies, such as DfID, USAID and the Norwegian Aid Agency (NORAD), now emphasise the democratisation of classrooms through the adoption of a learner-centred pedagogy. The pedagogy

is expected to break current authoritarian practices in periphery schools so as to produce individuals whose mindset would be compatible with the political conditions deemed necessary for the penetration of the free-market economic system. Interestingly, the aid agencies are exporting the pedagogy at a time when the same pedagogy is being denigrated in the very same donor countries that are exporting it.

That a pedagogical style can be used as a political instrument should not be surprising at all because education is a political activity, and to make curricular choices, such as adopting a particular pedagogy, is to engage in a political activity. Ginsburg et al. (1992:424) contend that the way educators organise their classrooms and the way they relate to and interact with their students is a form of political activity:

different forms of classroom social relations facilitate or impede the developments (sic) of students' political efficacy and orientation to public forms of political involvement.

Ginsburg and his colleagues conclude that adopting pedagogies that are authoritarian or democratic may either reinforce or contradict the political structures obtaining nationally or globally. Thus, there is a close affinity, say, between a democratic pedagogy (such as learner-centredness) and political structures associated with democratic practice. It is, therefore, reasonably safe to conclude that aid agencies' interest in learner-centred pedagogy is intended to reinforce liberal democracy in periphery states.

To illustrate this point, I shall take the Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP) in Botswana as an example. This was a USAID-funded project (1981-1991) whose aim was to 'provide technical assistance to the GOB [Government of Botswana] in the areas of primary pre-service and in-service education improvement' (United States Agency for International Development 1986:6). Analysis of some of the instructional interventions that were implemented during the project reveals that embedded in the interventions was a form of classroom practice akin to the constructivist, learner-centred pedagogy. Following the concentration so far on highlighting the political dimensions of the learner-centred pedagogy, it is logical to consider the economic dimensions of learner-centredness.

Learner-centredness and Economic Development

As argued above, the democratization imperative was intertwined with the economic imperative of spreading free-market capitalism. The global economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s led to a questioning of the efficacy of

the then dominant Fordist forms of economic production and organization. New patterns of production were needed, and with them a new kind of worker. This new worker approximates to Castells' (1997) 'self-programmable' worker. This worker is a lifelong learner, one who constantly redefines his/her skills for a given task. The call in the new patterns of production is for a multi-skilled, adaptable, and flexible workforce. The 'self-programmable' worker is contrasted with the 'generic' worker (Castells 1997) who acquires his/her skills through what Clegg (1999) terms 'exploitative learning', associated with a more traditional manufacturing economy. As a result, education the world over is being reformed to endow learners (defined as future workers) with the attributes (such as creativity, versatility, innovativeness, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a positive disposition towards teamwork) that the new 'flexible economy' (Rassool 1993) requires.

Commentators have observed that work in the industrialized world has in the past two decades undergone fundamental structural reorganization leading to 'significant changes in the practices, ethos, values and discourses of the world of work' (Johnson et al. 2003:20). New patterns of production driven by technological and organizational changes have emerged. Some have termed these new patterns 'post-Fordism' (Brown and Lauder 1992) and some 'fast capitalism' (Gee et al. 1996). Brown and Lauder (1992:3) have described post-Fordism as a system of production 'based on adaptable machinery, adaptable workers, flatter hierarchies, and the breakdown of the division between mental and manual labour and learning'. It is a matter for debate (see Brown and Lauder 1992; Muller 2000; Johnson et al. 2003) as to what exactly caused this shift from Fordist to post-Fordist production patterns. However, there seems to be consensus on hyper-competition in the global market resulting from deregulated national markets as a major cause of the shift.

Technological changes have led to unpredictability, uncertainty and constant change in the labour market. Skills, therefore, cannot be fixed for any particular job. As Silcock (1996:200) observes, 'the best workers, like the best learners, are those whose understanding transcends situationally gained skills'. Due to constant technological changes, knowledge has become ephemeral. This constant state of flux means that workers are forever learning. One-off training is no longer adequate. Hence, the renewed interest in the concept of lifelong learning. This discourse of global competitiveness 'means that economies require a well-qualified population and that they require workers with flexible, generic and constantly up-gradable skills' (Muller 2000:95), that is, self-programmable workers.

Unlike self-programmable workers, generic workers follow directions in hierarchically organized work environments. These workers do not have to demonstrate initiative, innovativeness and creativity since they are ‘hired from the neck down’ (Gee *et al.* 1996). In fact, they are discouraged from demonstrating these qualities. Their work is alienating and deskilling. But as Hickox and Moore (1992) observe, deskilling work processes, centralized decision making, and celebration of the dichotomy between conception and execution, all of which characterized Fordist forms of production, are being challenged.

The World Bank (1999:2) captures succinctly the nature of the worker suited to the ‘new’ economy:

Tomorrow’s workers will need to be able to engage in lifelong education, learn new things quickly, perform more non-routine tasks and more complex problem-solving, take more decisions, understand more about what they are working on, require less supervision, assume more responsibility, and – as vital tools to these ends – have better reading, quantitative, reasoning, and expository skills.”

Windschitl (2002:135) avers that the ‘new’ economy places ‘a premium on employees who can think creatively, adapt flexibly to the new demands, identify as well as solve problems, and create more complex products in collaboration with others’. Gee *et al.* (1996:12) observe that this paradigm shift in the kind of worker now required in the capitalist workplace has ‘major implications for the nature of schools and schooling, as well as for society as a whole’. The dominant view is that only nations with education systems that are attuned to the changed patterns of production are the ones that are mostly likely to survive in a global market place characterized by hyper-competition. In response to this likely scenario, nations all over the world are restructuring their education systems in an effort to improve their economic competitiveness. A view of how workers of the future are to be educated is also emerging (Hartley 2003); de Clercq (1997:156) captures the direction in which education should move:

The education system has [...] to shift from a system that differentiates and socializes students for the rigid hierarchical division of labour of modern industrial societies, to a system producing high-ability quality [sic] products with the ability to solve problems, think critically and apply new skills and techniques to different situations.

It is now the task of education to deliver this kind of learner/worker. More specifically targeted for reforms are the extant social relations in the classroom, that is, pedagogy. A constructivist, learner-centred pedagogy has emerged as the preferred pedagogy for the production of the self-programmable learner/worker.

This view of the new role of education in a hyper-competitive economic environment has been 'embraced' by bilateral aid organizations, their governments and the world financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF. It has been integrated in their aid/loan/grant packages, and through these packages, it is propagated around the world, especially in aid-dependent sub-Saharan Africa. Aid to education invariably insists on the pedagogy. Even aid-independent countries (such as Botswana, Namibia and South Africa) but which nonetheless depend on multilateral organizations for economic advice, are told to target education, especially pedagogical styles for reform.

Discussion of contemporary interest in constructivist, learner-centred pedagogy would be incomplete without a comment on the role played by the digital revolution in general and the computer, in particular, in the resurgence of progressive education ideals. The Internet has democratized access to knowledge, diminishing the traditional 'fountain-image' of the teacher. As Seymour Papert (1980) has argued, learners' interaction with the computer boosts self-directed learning, which eventually facilitates the construction of new knowledge. In his /her interactions with electronic media, the learner ceases to be an imbiber of received wisdom and becomes an active constructor of knowledge. The computer, therefore, is transformative: '[I]n teaching the computer how to think, children embark on an exploration about how they themselves think. The experience can be heady: Thinking about thinking turns the child into an epistemologist' (Papert 1980:19). In this sense, the computer has a 'liberating' effect in that it 'rescues' the learner from the overbearing authority of the teacher: 'The teacher becomes a partner in a joint enterprise of understanding something that is truly unknown because the situations created by each child are totally new' (Papert, as cited in Robins and Webster 1999:189). To the extent that the computer puts the learner in a position of control in the learning process, it facilitates the disintegration of teacher-centred pedagogies and empowers the learner. Thus, there is affinity between computer literacy and progressive education traditions, of which the constructivist, learner-centred pedagogy is a part.

The attractiveness of the constructivist, learner-centred pedagogy, therefore, emanates from its promise to deliver political democracy, economic development and individual freedom. Chisholm and Leyendecker (2008:202) observe that in sub-Saharan Africa 'learner-centred education is considered the vehicle to drive societies and economies from mainly agricultural bases into modern and knowledge-based societies with the attendant economic benefits'. If indeed the quality of a country's human resource base is the determinant of

its economic performance and learner-centred pedagogy is perceived as the most appropriate pedagogy to produce the self-programmable worker, then no country would like to lag behind in upgrading its human capital base, hence the education reform stampede we are witnessing. Take Botswana as an example. In 1994, and against the backdrop of a harsh global economic reality, Botswana unveiled a new policy, the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE), which, in many ways, was a response to perceived changes in global patterns of production and industrial organization. Its main thrust was the development and sustenance of a 'workforce which can apply advanced technology and respond competitively to the changing demands of the international economy' (Republic of Botswana 1993:xii). In short, the RNPE aimed at producing the learner-equivalent of the self-programmable worker.

Illustrating the general point about the relationship between learner-centredness and liberal democracy is the case of the Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP) (1981-1991), a USAID-sponsored project in Botswana whose aim was to increase access and improve the quality and relevance of primary education in the country. Three instructional innovations were implemented through PEIP, namely the Breakthrough Project, the Project Method and the Botswana Teaching Competency Instruments (BTCI). Embedded in these innovations were certain social values and forms of participation related to political orientation that the project wanted students to develop. There is scant evidence to support the view that the project aimed at improving teaching and learning. What is clear is that the project aimed at developing democratic social relations in both the classroom and the school. Thus, the project's purpose should be understood in political and ideological terms, not in cognitive/educational ones. And this is not unique to Botswana. Citing Leyendecker (2003) and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Namibia, Chisholm and Leyendecker (2008) state that in Namibia, learner-centredness was chosen as the vehicle to drive the process of political reform and to achieve access to education for all, equity, education for democracy, and democracy in education. The following comes from *Toward Education for All* (1993:41), a book published by the Namibia Ministry of Education and Culture:

To develop education for democracy we must develop democratic education . . .
Our learners must understand that democracy means more than just voting....
[and] ... that they cannot simply receive democracy from those who rule their
society. . . To teach about democracy our teachers – and our education system as
a whole – must practice democracy.

PEIP and the Consolidation of Democracy in Botswana: The Role of USAID

PEIP emanated from the influential *Education for Kagisano (Social Harmony)*, the report of the 1977 National Commission on Education, which was set up to look into ways of improving both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the Botswana education system. The report identified primary education as being terminal for almost half of the children completing Standard Seven (Republic of Botswana 1977). It was thus crucial to increase access and improve the quality and relevance of primary education. The government subsequently set out to address these concerns, but was faced with severe shortages of human and financial resources to execute its plan. To circumvent this challenge, the government sought assistance from the USA. The result was the GOB-USAID collaboration which gave birth to the PEIP.

When the project ended in 1991, its accomplishments included the establishment of a fully functioning Department of Primary Education at the University of Botswana (UB), a Master of Education Degree programme in primary education at UB, curriculum and institutional development at the primary teacher training colleges, and an In-service Education Network (Evans and Knox 1991). The ultimate goal of all these developments was to improve the quality, relevance and effectiveness of teaching and learning in primary schools. However, it is not explicit what terms like 'quality', 'effectiveness' and 'relevance' really meant, all the more so when their meanings are relative. Nevertheless, one can glean the image of quality teaching and learning the project was intended to promote from the nature of the interventions that were put in place. It is clear from the interventions that there were certain social values and forms of participation related to political orientation that the project wanted students to develop. Through the interventions, the project sought to promote democratic social relations through a constructivist and co-operative approach to teaching and learning. To illustrate this, I will briefly discuss three instructional innovations that were implemented through PEIP with the aim of altering teachers' and students' classroom practices. These are *Breakthrough to Literacy in Setswana: The Project Method*, and the *Botswana Teaching Competency Instruments*. The first two were initially British-sponsored, but on realising that they could contribute 'markedly to the achievement of the stated PEIP objectives' (Evans and Knox 1991:56), USAID materially supported the innovations.

Why would USAID be interested in a democratic pedagogy in Botswana? Its interest in a democratic pedagogy can be understood in the context of the USA's foreign policy. The US government funds projects aimed at promoting

democracy globally as part of its wider foreign policy. This legislative mandate has existed since 1961. In the 1980s and 1990s, the US government initiated two projects, Project Democracy and the Democracy Initiative respectively. Both were aimed at integrating democracy into the USAID programme. As Crawford (1995:105) observes, through the Democracy Initiative, for example, democracy was to be ‘incorporated in all development projects and programmes both as a desired end in itself and as means to increase effectiveness’. It is, therefore, not surprising that PEIP, as a USAID-funded project, aimed at democratising classroom social relations ostensibly through learner-centred pedagogy.

Breakthrough to Literacy in Setswana

This innovation was based on the Breakthrough to Literacy approach that was developed and first used in England. It was introduced in Botswana in the 1980s. As a method of teaching it was aimed at improving Standard One children’s reading and writing abilities. As a philosophy of teaching, it is anchored in the ideology of learner-centredness. It involves children taking some control of their learning and co-operating with each other in the learning process. It intends to change the prevailing authoritarian student-teacher relationship to a more democratic one in which the teacher is a facilitator of the students’ learning, not an arbiter of all knowledge. For example, it emphasises a shift from whole class teaching to group and individual teaching, from competition to co-operation, from students as followers to students as leaders, and from students working in isolation to co-operative and differentiated learning in which students freely discuss their work. The approach recognises the value and legitimacy of students’ existing knowledge and daily experiences (Horgan et al. 1991). Breakthrough aims to develop questioning individuals, capable of carrying out empirical investigations and arriving at rational conclusions. One criticism of African education systems is that they produce people who cannot think independently and critically (Basse 1999). These are people who, for example, unquestioningly accept authority. Such a character trait is seen as inimical to democracy. It is, therefore, not surprising that PEIP, as a USAID-sponsored project, supported the Breakthrough Approach since it aimed at eroding traditional habits. There is evidence that the innovation is succeeding in this regard. In her study of the Breakthrough Approach in Botswana, Arthur (1998:320) pointed out that it has:

prompted expressions of concern on the part of parents that children in these classrooms are being socialized . . . into culturally inappropriate behaviour such as approaching adults (for help or showing off their work), instead of waiting at a respectful distance.

Thus, Breakthrough challenges the hierarchical social relations that characterise the Botswana culture.

The Project Method

Just like Breakthrough, the Project Method is a child-centred method of teaching and learning. It was incorporated in primary schools to consolidate the successes of the Breakthrough Approach. As already stated, one objective of the latter was to produce individuals capable of investigating and discovering the world around them. The Project Method was an attempt to achieve this objective. With this method, students work independently as individuals or in groups to investigate an identified problem. Working together in groups, students share ideas and listen to the views of others, in the process evaluating these views in relation to their own. Also important is that students become less dependent on their teachers. This empowers them, giving them the freedom to exercise choice, an important aspect of liberal democracy (Komba 1998). Thus, in the process of carrying out investigations, students develop psycho-social skills that are relevant to a liberal democracy.

The architects of PEIP also realised that altering classroom practices through the two innovations discussed above would not succeed without a democratic supervision model. School inspection activities in Botswana could best be described as fault-finding and oppressive by emphasising the expert-inexpert dichotomy, thus perpetuating the teacher's dependency on the inspector. These hierarchical social relations in effect mirror the hierarchical organisation of schools in the country. The hierarchical organisation is also expressed in the classroom in the form of the authoritarian, teacher-centred methods of teaching and learning. The latter point is taken up in Chapter Seven for more detailed discussion.

Thus it would be a futile exercise to attempt to alter classroom social relations while the enveloping school social structure remained oppressive. As Smyth (1986:143) rightly points out:

Where the possibilities for genuinely unconstrained communication are limited because of hierarchical relationships, it is not difficult to see how more democratic means of learning can be thwarted.

The architects of PEIP were clearly aware of this fact and consequently proposed a mode of instructional supervision, the Botswana Teaching Competency Instruments (BTCI), which would, if properly implemented, diffuse a democratic ethos throughout the entire school social structure.

The Botswana Teaching Competency Instruments (BTCI)

This was based on the Teacher Performance Assessment Instrument (TPAI) developed by the University of Georgia, Department of Education. The BTCI comprised two sets of competencies which fell into two main categories: Classroom Procedures and Interpersonal Skills. Yoder and Mautle (1991:33) state that, 'The instrument identifies characteristics of good primary school teaching; focusing in general on what could be broadly termed child-centred teaching methodologies'. The instrument sought to democratise supervision by emphasising the notion of 'collegiality', defined as:

the genuinely non-threatening state of mind that exists between teachers who are prepared to assist each other in arriving at a joint understanding of their own and each other's teaching; in other words, the development of a shared framework of meaning about teaching' (Smyth 1984:33)

This collegiality was to be exercised in a variety of ways; head teachers observing teachers teach and vice versa; education officers observing teachers and vice versa; and teachers observing one another. In all these settings the observer was not to act as an expert, but rather as a partner in an attempt to improve teaching and learning in the classroom. Using the BTCI required the supervisor and the supervisee to agree in advance on what was to be observed and when. After the lesson the partners had to discuss the observations, giving feedback to each other, ultimately coming up with a product each felt they had an opportunity to produce. This conceptualisation of instructional supervision represented a fundamental shift from the authoritarian and manipulative approach prevailing then.

It is not difficult to see the effects a mode of instructional supervision such as the BTCI, if properly implemented, would have on social relations in the school. It would break the hierarchical relationships between the education officers, head teachers and class teachers. It would bring class teachers closer to each other, breaking the marked isolation and privacy that characterise teaching (Denscombe 1982). A democratic school environment can greatly facilitate institutionalisation of innovations (such as the Breakthrough Approach and the Project Method) aimed at democratising classroom social relations. No wonder PEIP found it necessary to support and co-ordinate the implementation of the three innovations discussed above.

Thus, it is not difficult to see the kind of image of quality and effective teaching these PEIP instructional innovations intended promoting; it would appear that the basic criterion for judging improvement in the quality of

teaching and learning in primary education was to be the presence of democratic social relations in the classroom. That is, in the view of PEIP, promotion of democratic social relations was a desired end in itself. If it were anticipated that democratic classroom social relations would then lead to improved student achievement, one would question the research basis of such an expectation. Any positive correlation between the two might simply be incidental. Bantock (1981:63), commenting on studies carried out by Anthony (1979) and Bennett (1976), concludes that the 'superiority of discovery methods cannot at present be justified on grounds of empirical research'. Thus, PEIP's version of quality and effective primary education should be understood in non-cognitive terms. Its intentions were political and ideological. It is clear that the learner-centred pedagogy that was embedded in PEIP was aimed at inculcating social and political values of individual autonomy, open-mindedness and tolerance for other people's views, all these being essential character traits required for an individual to operate effectively in a liberal democratic political environment. Given Botswana's own concern with nurturing its nascent democracy and the USA's official policy of spreading democracy globally through its international aid programmes, it is not surprising that PEIP emphasised learner-centred pedagogy which was aimed at democratising the school ambience.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to demonstrate the political and economic basis of the learner-centred pedagogy. This objective is to be understood in the context of the argument (advanced in the preceding chapter) that learner-centred pedagogy is a political and economic artifact which can never be said to be value-neutral. Its contemporary efficacy is more political/economic than educational/cognitive. Interest in learner-centred pedagogy was spurred by the rise of neo-liberalism in the 1980s as the dominant economic/political ideology. Neoliberalism became enshrined in the policies of bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, displacing modernisation theory. In terms of Third World development, neo-liberalism surmised that economic development was only possible where there was liberal democracy. Education, as a change agent, had an indispensable role to play in both the democratisation and economic development processes in those countries. To achieve this, aid agencies identified the learner-centred pedagogy (because of its democratic tendencies) as the appropriate pedagogy in the development and dissemination of democratic social relations in Third World schools.

The example of PEIP is a specific example of the general point that learner-centredness as introduced in sub-Saharan Africa is more of a political/economic artifact than an educational innovation. Essentially, aid agencies saw the pedagogy's efficacy as lying in its ability to promote values associated with both liberal democracy and the knowledge-based economy. It was envisaged that the pedagogy would help to break authoritarian structures in schools and that through its erosion of traditional modes of thought, it would produce individuals with the right disposition towards a liberal democracy and a changed workplace. It is for this reason that I have argued in the chapter that aid agencies' primary interest in the pedagogy is political and ideological, not educational. It is in this context that learner-centred pedagogy's much-praised capacity to promote 'quality' and 'effective' education should be understood. Given that there is no compelling empirical research evidence that there is a positive (and causal) relationship between the pedagogy and students' cognitive learning, couching its efficacy in cognitive/educational terms at best appears to be an attempt to disguise its ideological mission.

What is emerging from this chapter is that there is a need to treat learner-centredness as a form of education that is laden with political and economic values. Its current dominance in sub-Saharan Africa and around the world can be sufficiently explained only if its political and economic contexts are appreciated. In the same vein, this very same political/economic context of its evolution is significant in understanding the pedagogy's failure to be institutionalized in sub-Saharan African classrooms. This failure might be a result, not so much of resource scarcity as it is of the very political/economic origins of the pedagogy. Teachers and students rationally choose pedagogical styles that fit their purposes, which, in the sub-Saharan African context, is to produce good examinations results. The latter are what define 'quality' teaching in this context. So, teachers and students tend to judge the efficacy of pedagogical innovations on the basis of their educational value and not their economic/political value, which latter value is, in any case, seldom made explicit to them. If teachers, students and administrators cannot ascertain the educational value of learner-centred pedagogy, the chances are high that they will reject or resist its introduction. This might be what is happening to the pedagogy in sub-Saharan Africa. Now, explaining this failure of the pedagogy to be institutionalized solely in terms of technical problems associated with the delivery processes (e.g. large student-teacher ratios, shortage of teaching materials, defective teacher education programmes, etc.) is simplistic and inadequate.