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Conclusion

Beyond Colonising Pedagogy

It is now time to bring together the central arguments of the book and to comment on the implications for teaching and learning of the socio-cultural approach to pedagogy. In the preceding chapters I have explored the effects of the ideology of technical rationality on pedagogy and how this rationality partially explains the failure to institutionalize learner-centred pedagogy in sub-Sahara African contexts. I have observed that the origins of this ideology can be traced back to the application of the scientific method, particularly the Newtonian, mechanistic cause-and-effect paradigm, to the study of teaching. Science prides itself for its supposedly objective, value-neutral methods of studying objective reality. It is the aim of science to 'discover' the laws that govern the operations of the universe. Scientific methods were adopted in a number of human sciences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, cause and effect was used to discover the laws that governed the operation of human societies, leading to the emergence of the field of sociology. In the field of human thinking, cause and effect laid the foundations for the discipline of psychology and led to the most enduring version of psychology generally referred to as 'behaviourism'. Teaching was not to be left behind in this stampede for scientific status. At the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, efforts to establish the 'scientific basis of the art of teaching' began, the result of which was the process-product paradigm of research on teaching. Teacher effectiveness research was born. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we witnessed a resurgence of this form of research, but only after a short lull. The effects of positivistic approaches to teaching can be summarized as follows:

- They have led to the neglect of pedagogy, that is, if pedagogy is taken to mean more than just the techniques of teaching (see Alexander 2008). The equation of pedagogy with the 'observable acts of teaching' reduces the former to a technical undertaking. Teaching in this sense becomes an act of establishing the ends of the activity and selecting the most effective means of realizing those ends. This reduces teaching to an exercise in instrumental problem solving. What is lost in this instrumentalisation is a sense of teaching as an ethical and moral activity, in that during teaching, teachers make decisions that are informed by their context (e.g. what they understand to be the nature of knowledge, their views on teaching and learning, etc.).

- The neglect of context in teaching has led to the preponderance of standardized solutions to problems of teaching and learning. One such solution is the ubiquitous recommendation that learner-centred pedagogy can address problems of 'quality' in education anywhere, any time. It is supposedly a one-size-fits-all pedagogical style which works well irrespective of context. This view of pedagogy becomes problematic once we acknowledge pedagogy as shaped and informed by contexts, be they political, cultural or economic.

- In teacher-education programmes, the influence of technical rationality manifests itself in terms of emphasis on students' mastery of techniques of teaching. In other words, emphasis in these programmes is on the 'how', but rarely on the 'why' of teaching. Such an emphasis on technique tends to produce technicians, not professionals capable of reflecting on their teaching. Attention to the 'why' question can assist prospective teachers to appreciate better the complexity and problematic nature of teaching.

- Where teaching is abstracted from its context, a simplistic view of the process of pedagogical reform reigns – reform failure is rationalized in terms of insufficient resources, high student-teacher ratios, and defective teacher-education programmes resulting in poorly trained teachers. The remedy is to pour more resources into the 'deficient' system with the hope that things will change. Yet, pedagogical change in the direction of learner-centredness is still as elusive as ever.

What should be done then, in order to mitigate these deleterious effects of the technicist approach to pedagogical reform? This book's general suggestion is that if a socio-cultural approach to pedagogy were adopted, the chances of successful pedagogical reform in sub-Sahara

Africa would be enhanced. This should not be read as an endorsement of learner-centred pedagogy. In fact, a socio-cultural approach to pedagogy invariably questions the desirability of a universal 'one-true', 'one-size-fits-all' approach to teaching, which is exactly as learner-centredness is presented. This 'one-true approach' to teaching can only serve to entrench the marginalization of pedagogies based on alternative epistemologies. And this is precisely the purpose served by prescribing learner-centred pedagogy as a universal panacea. To the extent that it is a worldview, constructivist learner-centred pedagogy, according to Bowers (2005) is 'the Trojan horse of Western imperialism' since it is an imposition of a Western worldview on other cultures.

In this book, this argument has fully been developed in Chapter Two. If different contexts call for different ways of approaching teaching, then it does not make much sense to prescribe a single approach to teaching and learning for all contexts. In any case, such prescription would amount to a relapse into technical rationality, the object of critique in this book. A socio-cultural approach should be the basis for developing culturally responsive indigenous pedagogies. These may or may not turn out to be pedagogies akin to constructivist learner-centred ones. Guthrie (2011) discusses what he calls 'the Progressive Education fallacy in developing countries', arguing, just like Bowers (2005), that constructivist learner-centred pedagogy is hegemonic and therefore inappropriate for developing countries. Concluding his defense of 'formalistic teaching', Guthrie calls for its accommodation (not its vilification) in Third World contexts. After all, equating learner-centred pedagogy with 'quality' education is as dubious as equating inquiry teaching with development of inquiry skills. Formalistic teaching, properly used, Guthrie (2011) argues, is as effective as any form of teaching in promoting inquiry, critical thinking, problem solving, and other 'soft' skills that are often unduly associated with constructivist teaching. As we continue searching for more effective pedagogies we ought to keep in mind the following words by Edith Ackermann:

[T]here is nothing wrong in showing kids the right ways of doing things, in helping them unfold their natural gifts, or in letting them discover things by themselves. Yet, both *inneism* and *behaviorism* (the believe (sic) in either "fixity" or extreme malleability of mind) can become a formula for disaster when worldviews are at odds, value systems clash, or when some "unpopular views" stubbornly persist within a community. That's

when we need to ask ourselves, in all simplicity, "who are we to tell the children of others what they should learn, and how? Who are we to know what's better for others, what's to be bettered? Such questions become particularly relevant in cultures that are not homogenous – in multi-cultural groups where different value systems have to learn to co-exist' (http://learning.media.mit.edu/content/publications/EA.Piaget%20 _%20Paper.pdf)

In other words, where there is diversity (of epistemologies, for example), as is the case in our world, one-size-fits-all approaches to anything are not feasible. This is a direct questioning of the hegemony of technical rationality and of the presentation of constructivist learner-centred pedagogy as universal pedagogy.