

Chapter 8

Theorising the Politics of Knowledge Production in Curriculum in Zimbabwe: Indigenous Knowledge Systems for Transformative Classroom Practices

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ABSTRACT

This chapter theorises the politics of knowledge production in order to understand the ways in which Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) could be framed as bases for promoting transformative classroom practices in Zimbabwe. Doing so is necessary as the school curricula of many education systems in postcolonial Africa remain subservient to the Western European epistemology. The trope, transformative uncolonial learning, is employed in order to re-imagine an ethical pedagogy that could result in transformative classroom practices. The argument developed is that history and dance, as implicated in the politics of the black body, could be re-framed as the basis of ethical classroom practices. To achieve this, teachers need to embrace productive pedagogies that promote pluriversity of knowledges as valid and legitimate school knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter employs two school subjects, History and Dance, to theorise the ways in which Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) could be framed as a basis for promoting productive pedagogies that have transformative potential to dismantle the dominant colonial underpinnings that inform the school curricula in many postcolonial states, Zimbabwe included. The modern nation of Zimbabwe was formerly known as Rhodesia, a colony of the British Empire. Colonisation forcibly incorporated the indigenous Africans into the capitalist system of production. To ensure unopposed exploitation of resources, colonialists harnessed the education system, and in the process, undermined the indigenous Zimbabwean knowledge systems. Consequently, a Eurocentric education system was imposed on the indigenous Zimbabweans who found themselves alienated from their history and cultural practices. Denied of such embodied anchoring, most black Zimbabwean recipients of Western European education found themselves willing participants in the denial and denigration of indigenous heritage, through an alien education system.

It is a sad reality that more than six decades after the first African states attained independence, the school curricula of many education systems in postcolonial Africa remain subservient to the Western European hegemonic epistemology (Breidlid, 2013). Regrettably, attempts by most postcolonial states at reforming their education systems have been largely futile (Bryant, 2018). Postcolonial curricula practices, grounded in Western epistemology as they are, have been inimical to the development of a critical and empowering educational paradigm. This reflects an ideological carryover of modernity, which, through the banner of “science”, entrenches “the utilisation of [the] dominant western world view of knowing and knowledge production as the only way of knowing” (Kaya & Seleti, 2013, p.33). Indigenous knowledges such as those embedded in History and Dance are thus peripherised and subjected to epistemic violence (Kincheloe (2007). Such practices, unfortunately, perpetuate the mental subjugation of postcolonial learners. Breidlid (2013, p. 5) expresses the point graphically where he observes that, “the global architecture of education is hegemonic”, which signifies that curricula discourses and practices worldwide misleadingly reflect imperialist epistemologies as the dominant grammars of learning. This not only results in undemocratic and unethical learning but also denies learners the opportunity to access the essential “transformative uncolonial learning” (Wane & Simmons, 2011, p. 3; Freire, 1990). This latter educational imperative could also enable the assertion of Indigenous knowledges and the reclamation of the African ‘being’ in an otherwise Eurocentric curriculum.

This chapter thus explores how postcolonial subjects, being trapped within a legacy of colonialism might begin to envisage epistemic insurrectionary strategies that could free them from the bondages of Eurocentric epistemologies (Gonye &

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