School Knowledge and Everyday Knowledge: Why the Binary Conceptualization?

by

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to illuminate the underlining reasons for the binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge. The historical and philosophical lens will be used as analytical tools for this discussion. The main argument of this paper is that the binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge is a social construct with latent functions where the colonizer's aim was to unfit the colonized for their habitation in order to maintain dependence and therefore ensure a continued supply of labour for their business establishments. Using Critical Pedagogy Theory that links education with the analysis of politics and economy; the paper also provides theoretical analysis on how learners and teachers are subjected to and are subjects of schooling in an effort to show how the binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge have been sustained and maintained. Last, the paper suggests Shor's and Freire's (1987) situated pedagogy which uses learner's everyday knowledge as foundation for the acquisition of school knowledge, and looks at the implication of the duality of the conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge for teacher education for readers introspection.

Key words: school knowledge, everyday knowledge, critical pedagogy, binary conceptualization, situated pedagogy

Introduction

The beginning of this discourse is the contextual definition of school knowledge and everyday knowledge. Binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge and school knowledge are taken to mean the formal kind of knowledge acquired by learners under the auspices of the school, supervised by the teacher (Tanner & Tanner 2000). Everyday knowledge is that informal knowledge that the learner acquires in the home environment independently or guided by an adult (Zais 1997).

The foregoing definitions tend to correlate with the notion that education is equated to formal school knowledge and knowledge with informal everyday knowledge. Thus, the primary difference between the two is that education (school knowledge) is a formal process whereas knowledge (everyday knowledge) is an informal experience. Yet, the use of the word education is rather problematic in the sense that it is usually restricted to school knowledge, but in reality, when education it is used in a general sense, it covers both formal and informal aspects of the educational process.

Furthermore, school knowledge (formal school education) is taught by teachers to students while everyday knowledge (informal education) is gained through every day experiences, which are self-driven, for example through a child's spontaneous and self-determined experiences at home. Hence, dual conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge is taken to imply that the school knowledge is considered as different and separate from everyday knowledge with the assumption that school knowledge and everyday knowledge run parallel and are unrelated.

The binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge leaves a number of questions unanswered, especially how the school is looked at as a part of a larger social eco-system. Hence questions of why the binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge, and who benefits from such conceptualization come to the fore. The twin conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge is taken to be a deliberate creation with motivation and assumptions latent and undeclared. In other words, there are underlying reasons for school knowledge that are not made explicit to the participants, because they serve the interest of one group at the expense of the other. The colonized for example were not supposed to benefit from school knowledge, but destined to remain the "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (Mungazi 1991).

The binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge characterises colonized states, especially in Africa where high status curricula and curriculum for the masses were used. High status curriculum according to Eggleston (1977) denoted curricula available only to a restricted group of students, i.e. of the White minority ruling class (in colonial Zimbabwe, Southern Africa). On the other hand, curriculum for the masses was developed for the native labouring poor. This kind of curriculum was structured differently as it was fundamentally and predominantly concerned with the basic skills of numeracy, literacy and menial skills, because the colonialists were not bent on preparing the Black child to function in an elite society, but instead, to be perpetual labourers. Hence, Eggleston (1977:31) supports this notion, and indicates that "it was defined so that it did not present a challenge to the status of the knowledge on which elite curricula were based; rather it reinforced and re-emphasized the lower status of vocational and utilitarian knowledge and skills." And it is apparent that within this circumstance, the native child, as defined by the colonialists must be denied the opportunity of realizing the application of school knowledge to everyday knowledge, because if the Black child is able to improve, there would be fierce competition in the job market, which the colonialists wanted to avoid by all means.

In agreement, McLaren (2008) argue that school knowledge is historically and socially rooted, interest bound and is deliberately designed to place the Black child in a position of perpetual servitude. To this end, the resultant ethnocentric approach to curriculum development is to ensure a 'horse and rider' relationship between the elite and the poor; with the everyday knowledge of the poor deemed unfit and incompatible to school experiences in an attempt to place the native outside any impending competition with their White counterparts.

McLaren (2008) is also of the view that to claim that knowledge is socially constructed means knowledge is heavily dependent on culture, context, custom and historical specificity. In this light, school knowledge in colonized Africa reflected the interests of the White minority (e.g., Zimbabwe, Southern Africa). Furthermore, school knowledge is never neutral, but ordered and structured in particular ways to achieve set aims and objectives in distinct and compartmentalized subjects, punctuated by ringing of bells to emphasize an exclusionary and underlying silent social logic. The silent logic is also exemplified by the close semblance between activities of the classroom and the production sector, where fragmentation of subjects correlated with production units in a factory (Blackledge & Hunt 1985). The whole idea is to deny Black workers knowledge of the whole process of production, lest they move out and start their own production, which would place them in a positive competitive edge, a situation the colonialists wanted to avoid at all cost.

Historical and Philosophical Foundations

The colonial governments in pursuing only one major policy towards Black people were to educate them so that they would become efficient economic labourers (Mungazi, 1991). Thus, education for African people was rooted in the concepts of pseudo-scientific Darwinism that maintains that Black people have low intellectual endowment (Darwin and Burrow, 1987). According to Mungazi (1991) the basic belief was that African people could only benefit from manual training as a viable form of education. School knowledge introduced by the colonial system in all form, content and structure was completely divorced from the Black learners' everyday knowledge. In other words, the whole idea of formal schooling was to impart the colonizer's culture and tradition from one generation to another, without considering the traditional or indigenous African knowledge systems throughout the continent.

The relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed is characterized by Freire (1972) in terms of prescription which in this discussion represents the imposition of one individual's choices upon another with no recourse on how it will have on the individual in transforming consciousness and therefore encouraging a prescribed consciousness that conforms to a particular prescriber's consciousness. Thus the behaviour of the oppressed is a prescribed behaviour fashioned by the oppressor; a prescription mediated through school knowledge, hence, encapsulated in the latent functions of the school curriculum.

According to Bowles and Gintis (1976) the hidden curriculum engages learner passivity and unquestioning obedience, and according to Tanner and Tanner (2000) it is the unintended outcomes of the school curriculum which usually holds the creativity of the native, which has never been recorded literally. Third, McLaren (2008) is of the view that the hidden curriculum deals with the tacit ways in which knowledge and behaviour get constructed outside the usual course materials and formally scheduled lessons, and thus part of the bureaucratic and managerial "press" of the school and the combined forces by which learners are induced to comply with dominant ideologies and social practices related to authority, behaviour and morality. According to Freire (1972), the concept suits the oppressor whose tranquillity rests on how well individuals fit the world the oppressor has created, and how little the oppressed question the hegemonic stance of the oppressor.

It would appear that the binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge appears to characterize previously colonized state in colonial Africa where schooling was used as a mechanism to subjugate the colonized (Machingura and Mutemeri 2005). Unfortunately most colonized African states at independence inherited the same kind of schooling that continued to create a divide between school knowledge and everyday knowledge, because changing the school situation meant that large sums of money which the independent states may not have had as the economic base would usually remain in the hands of the previously ruling minority.

Nevertheless, in Zimbabwe there have been moves towards making curriculum relevant, e.g. changes in content in history and geography textbooks, with more focus on local issues in an effort to empower learners in building their confidence and in promoting social relevance (Brodie, Lelliot, and Davis 2002; Kasanda et al. 2005; Koosimile 2004; Taylor 1999).

Robinson (1996) echoes this same sentiment that postcolonial language policies have maintained the status quo, thus perpetuating the existence of an elite group; characterized by relatively high economic status, high educational level and high competence in English. Thus, this binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge remains a hurdle to be crossed long after the colonizer has left. In this context, Bamgbose (1991) contends that African nations remain "prisoners of the past" since they are so overwhelmed by established practices to the extent that they often find it virtually impossible to break away from them. But in Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture broke away successfully and provided Zimbabweans with worthwhile education focused use of the mother tongue in early childhood education in the early 2000s.

In unity, Sikoyo and Jacklin (2009) stress the idea that everyday knowledge should be referenced in school as a key element of progressive pedagogy in pursuit of social relevance and meaningful learning experiences. Here, this two-way relationship between school and everyday knowledge is referred to as a 'double-move' by Hedegaard (1998) and as 'border-crossing' by Aikenhead (1996) which requires a careful 'navigation' of the boundary between these forms of knowledge (Muller and Taylor 1995). Hence, the major issue at this juncture is the determination of what experiences and in what form they are used in the classroom situation based on the idea not to privilege every everyday experience, but to determine how bridges could be built to privilege particular knowledge for the benefit of student development.

Consequently, in determining how bridges could be built to privilege particular knowledge for the benefit of student development we are reminded by Weiler and Mitchell (1992) that school curriculum, social relationships in the classroom and the ways in which the classroom operate reflects the larger social context which is sustained and maintained through school knowledge to sustain and maintain the status quo for certain centres of power, echoed in the classroom (Shor and Freire, 1987). Here we can see that such authoritarian manner denies the exercise of creativity among teachers and students (Freire, 1998), and accordingly, the centre is above all commanding and manipulating for both the educators, and the learners.

Thus, according to Reed and Black (2006) the organizational framework of the school ultimately shapes how teachers do their work, based on the organizational features that typically define a school as a school, which include how:

- Learners are grouped in classrooms by age.
- School day division into periods, usually with bells at the start and end of each.
- Content is divided into certain discrete disciplines.
- Learners are grouped by ability and assumed potential.

These taken for granted as routines of the school often go unquestioned, and therefore they represent a form of control mechanism to place the colonized or formerly colonized (especially Black people) into perpetual servitude. For example, a school day is usually deliberately fragmented in order to deny students an opportunity to see the interrelatedness and wholeness of concepts, lest they start making independent discoveries and inventions. Here one can ask a simple question like who benefits, who would lead in such an injustice (Reed and Black, 2006) which links to Bowles and Gintis' (1976) correspondence principle concerning how school knowledge is structured to correspond with capitalist economic activities. Hence, the actual stance of all colonial/neo-colonial education systems which unfortunately still stands unchanged today, with a few exceptions. And furthermore, as Giroux (1992) argues (and in the context of schools in colonial Zimbabwe, Southern Africa and other sites of Black subjugation), schools generally operate in a white upper-middle class logic where school knowledge is mediated in a language foreign to the African child in an effort to initiate the child into a foreign language and culture wherein the child often begins to disparage their own tradition, custom and cultural background. This is obvious in Africa today wherein in all African states colonized by the British, English remains the dominate medium of instruction.

Profoundly, the double conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge situates the learner at a crossroads wherein he or she lives in two worlds; that of the home and the other of the school. And in the scenario discussed here, school knowledge does not reflect the learner's culture, custom and tradition. Lawton (1975) thus argues that the school curriculum should be selected from the culture, custom and traditions of the indigenes, and culture according to Skilbeck (1984), a roadmap that serves to guide and direct the experiences of people should be present in the schools. But, unfortunately, to the learners who are immersed in a culture that is not theirs, they do not know how and where to go which according to Irvine and Armento (2001), creates cultural discontinuity or a lack of cultural synchronization between the learner and the school which creates conflicts in the learner, making achievement practically impossible for the majority. Hence, the incompatibility between school knowledge and everyday knowledge creates in the learners a cognitive dissonance that culminates into backwardness and an inability to achieve appreciable progress in life as a whole (Irvine, 1990).

Further, Cochran-Smith (1995) believes that cultural discontinuity leads to psychological discomfort and low achievement when learners perceive that the school setting is hostile, incongruous and incompatible with their aspirations for the future. And when there is a cultural mismatch or cultural incompatibility between learners and their school, the inevitable follow, which includes miscommunication, alienation, diminished self-esteem and eventual school failure (Irvine, 1990); one of the latent functions of school knowledge the colonialists (and all oppressors) aimed to achieve so that Black people would become their life-long labourers.

The binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge leads to what Dewey (1915) terms wastage of learners' experiences. According to Jackson (1990) when Dewey refers to waste in education, he refers to wastage of children's experiences which are not considered in the development of the curricula. Dewey was of the view that all curricula should take into account the various experiences of the learner. The argument is that from the stand point of the child, the great waste in the school comes from the child's inability to utilize the experiences gained outside the school in any complete and free manner within the school itself. Thus, regrettably, the child is unable to apply in daily life what is learned at school, making the transfer of learning practically impracticable. This is deliberate and calculated isolation of the school from the child's life world. In this light, when the child gets into the classroom he or she has to close a large part of his or her acquired experiences in terms of ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in the home and neighbourhood. And unfortunately the school is unable to utilize these everyday experiences and sets to arouse a child's interest in school studies (Jackson 1990). In this scenario, the child's everyday knowledge is of no use within the classroom situation, and what this means according to Freire (1972:44) is that learners come to school "as empty receptacles to be filled by the teacher", hence the task of the teacher according to Shor and Freire (1987) is to fill the learners with the contents of the teacher's narration, content often detached from reality. And if concept formation is like laying building blocks, then to the disadvantaged learner, school knowledge acquisition could be likened to a house built without a strong foundation.

Learner alienation from school also results from the binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge wherein the learner becomes alienated and gets immersed in a new culture mediated in English as second language, and thus, the disadvantaged learner is robbed of his or her store of meaningful vocabulary (Freire, 1972), and subsequently, the child's store of vocabulary is deliberately emptied of its concreteness and therefore, it becomes hollow, alienated and meaningless in the broader context of schooling/education.

Above all the binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge results in the underdevelopment of learners, and the major question is how can they develop using a language and experiences that are not their own for their education? Here Freire (1972:61) argues that "it is in speaking their word that men transform the world by naming it, dialogue imposes itself as the way in which men achieve significance as man". It comes as no surprise that most of the disadvantaged groups who have achieved great heights in school knowledge are not creative or inventors because their school dialogue was reduced to the act of one person depositing ideas to another (Shor and Freire, 1987). Hence, the banking concept of education files away individuals who lack creativity, and are not able to transform; and the argument is that apart from inquiry and apart from the praxis individuals cannot be truly human (Freire 1972:46). And according to Freire (1972), liberation is praxis, and therefore, an action and reflection of individuals upon their world in their effort to transform it. However, this liberation is hampered if school knowledge is prescriptive because the more learners work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness naturally inherent in them.

Responsive Pedagogy, Stakeholder Language Preference, and Ideological Orientations

Irvine and Armento (2001) argue for a culturally responsive pedagogy as a way forward whereas the culturally responsive pedagogy mirrors and capitalizes on learners' experiences. Being responsive means to be aware of and capable of responding in educationally constructive ways to the cultural patterns that influence the behavioural and mental ecology of the classroom. Here, the learner's everyday knowledge is used as foundation in the acquisition of school knowledge. Shor and Freire (1987) refer to this responsive pedagogy as situated pedagogy where the teacher situates learning in the learners' culture, custom and tradition, literacy, themes, present cognitive-affective lives, aspirations and in their daily lives. It is in this way that learning is lodged in the subjectivity (motivation) of the learners, making learning meaningful and appreciable.

However, Shor and Freire's suggestion also reads this is source for dilemma for a teacher of a multicultural class (a similar sentiment is echoed by Carr who also observes several challenges that confront the educator). Carr (2008:83) argues that educators are "advised to take into account the context of instruction when there is more and more content to teach and to learn; and goes on to indicate that the educational context of how, what and why we learn; who decides; how is the human condition factored into the equation; what are the implications are questions submerged in a deluge of content in terms of the expectations, standards, objectives, lesson plans and prescriptive curriculum documents wherein the context also includes students background, where they are, how they experience phenomena and the myriad issues that frame how culture, custom and tradition are shaped (Nieto, 1999).

The other dilemma inherent in the management of the divide between school knowledge and everyday knowledge is stakeholder preference of language of instruction. While studies carried out by researchers such as Bamgbose (1991) in Nigeria, Ndamba (2008) in Zimbabwe have indicated the advantage of starting schooling using mother tongue. In the Zimbabwe context, learners and parents preferred the use of English as medium of instruction. Justifiably so, as English in most African nations remain the official language for business and language of instruction. In this light, educators tend to feel that they are wasting time if they concentrate on using mother tongue for young learners' instruction. This dilemma further perpetuates the divide between school knowledge and everyday knowledge – all at the expense of the learner.

It is important that educators within nations that inherited the binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge (given the society's historical predisposition to view culturally and linguistically diverse students through a deficit lens that positioned them as less intelligent, talented, qualified and deserving) to critically understand their ideological orientations with respect to these differences and begin to comprehend that teaching is not a politically or ideologically neutral undertaking (Reed and Black, 2006). According to Bartolome (2004) it is important to acknowledge that the academic under achievement of the disadvantaged groups in African societies cannot be addressed in primarily methodological and technical terms dislodged from the material, social and ideological conditions that have shaped and sustained such failure rates. There is a foundational perspective that needs to be investigated if anything good can be done to assist the African child to achieve in the formal school setting.

Implication for Teacher Education

The above discussion about the binary conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge points to the need to go back to the teacher education curriculum and infuse key critical pedagogical principles in order to prepare educators to name and interrogate potentially harmful ideologies and practices in the schools and classrooms where they work. Leistyna (2004) explains that critical pedagogy is primarily concerned with the kinds of educational theories and practices that encourage both teacher educators and student teachers to develop an understanding of the interconnecting relationships among ideology, power and culture. In order for teachers to better understand the three way relation, two important critical pedagogical principles need to inform teacher education curriculum; that is a critical understanding of dominant ideologies and exposure to and development of effective counter-hegemonic discourses to resist and transform such oppressive practices (Darder, Torres and Baltodano, 2008).

According to Bartolome (2004) critical pedagogical principles would expose teacher education students to a variety of ideological postures so that they can begin to perceive their own ideologies in relation to others and critically examine the damaging biases they may personally hold, and the inequalities and injustices present in schools and in society as a whole. The implication of the foregoing is that teachers need to understand the limitations and nefarious nature of the tightly prescriptive formal curriculum and also to seek out opportunities to make it more relevant, meaningful and critical. The suggestion here is that teachers in training should be taught curriculum reform and innovation so that they are able to make appreciable contribution toward curriculum change.

In light of the above, McLaren (2008) observes that the dialectical nature of critical theory enables the educator to see the school not simply as an arena of indoctrination or socialization or a site of instruction, but also as a cultural terrain that promotes student empowerment and self-transformation. In sum, the content is always more appropriate, relevant and engaging when it is contextualized to fathom in learners previously acquired knowledge, and when it takes into consideration the needs and realties of the learners in their traditional social contexts.

Conclusion

The motivating force behind the dual conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge, especially in colonized Africa has been discussed in this paper. Thus, the prescriptive nature of school knowledge is seen as the foundation to the twin conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge wherein schools are deliberately used as mechanisms for the maintenance of the dual conceptualization discussed. Furthermore, within this duality in the conceptualization of school knowledge and everyday knowledge, the disadvantaged learner is alienated, has a lose self-esteem and are confused as they try to battle to master a new culture mediated in a second language. To assist in alternatives ways of moving forward, situated pedagogy which uses learner's everyday knowledge as foundation for the acquisition of school knowledge is suggested and that in order to transform the schools and society in Africa, there is also a need to transform how educators are educated.

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