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POSSIBILITIES IN AFRICAN SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION[1]

George J. Sefa Dei

ABSTRACT

This chapter continues to make the argument for the use of indigenous knowledge systems in current and revamped curricula, with the intent to explore possible ways to rethink the failing African educational system. The chapter further examines the implications for change and adaptation of African curricula for pedagogy and policy within African societies. The author argues that in order to imagine new curricular possibilities, policy-makers and educational development leaders must deconstruct the myth of development as progressive and indigenous as stagnant to further understand the value of indigenous knowledge systems. Finally, this chapter offers critiques and suggestions for alternative education in Africa that would serve foremost local needs and aspirations.

INTRODUCTION

Schooling and education in Africa has always been a hot topic. This is, in part, due to the realization of the powerful link between education and development. For a continent whose destiny is remarkably tied to dominant pronouncements of and about "what development is," "what development ought to be," and "why have development in the first place," it is understandable that education and development have become serious business. Literally, education is about social transformation. Education is about equipping learners with knowledge, skill, and resources that allow them to improve their own conditions and to contribute to building healthy, sustainable communities. As a community we are successful in these undertakings because we believe in the existence of quality education; as well, we understand how issues of equity, accountability, power, and knowledge are all implicated in the processes of educational delivery. Clearly, all learners bring multiple readings and knowledges to the pursuit of education and its goals of social development. Such a multiple knowledge base allows for a critical interrogation (and possible subversion) of dominant/hegemonic perspectives that have historically guided the approach to development and education in African contexts. By bringing more critical, local, and cultural resource knowledge to bear on an academic project – challenging deployment and appropriating the discourse of neo-liberal reform – we offer alternative and genuine education and development options. It is no secret that, within much of contemporary Africa (as in many parts of the West), talk of education is taken over by concerns and emphasis on standards, accountability, promotion of education excellence, search for human competencies, and human capital development (see also Kerr, 2005). The relations between quality education and education that serves the needs of a local population cannot simply be assumed. They must be theorized. Responding to this could be an additional contribution of the paper to existing knowledge. Schooling, education, and development are related in part because individually none of them are the sole sites, or avenues, for sustaining healthy communities and improving human lives.

My intent in this chapter is to share with readers ways of rethinking African schooling and education[2] and then examine the

pedagogical and policy implications for African societies. The discussion has a personal political edge. As I am a continental African by birth, and I am speaking about a new praxis of African education, a politicized perspective, I am concerned about what has been happening to education on the continent over the past several decades. I may speak for many when I say that, in my schooling years, both on the continent and in North America, the education that I have received tended to least emphasize the achievements and contributions of African peoples in their own right. This has been a form of education that can only be characterized as "non-indigenized education." It is education imposed on Africa by external forces. It has been an education that has for the most part failed to deeply cultivate self-esteem and pride in peoples of African descent. It was and still is a Eurocentric education, and it continues to distort, misappropriate, and misinterpret African human condition and reality.

It is my contention that, in order to imagine new possibilities, African peoples must deconstruct the myth of *development* using local, traditional, and indigenous cultural knowledge systems. A fundamental challenge is to unravel how dominant thinking shapes what constitutes development. Today, local peoples continue to struggle for new cultural, economic, and political imaginings and imaginaries. There is a need for new visions and counter-theoretical perspectives of education and development to disentangle *development* and *education* from the grip of dominant paradigms. At the same time, in working with critical and alternative/counter ideas we think creatively about *education and development* in ways that avoid an easy slippage into the form, logic, and implicit assumptions and postulations of what exactly we are contesting. In other words, education for development is not just about an increase in physical and human capital. Education for development requires changes both in ways of thinking and in the social, political, cultural, and economic institutions of society. Local peoples have not been passive recipients of *development* knowledge. Local knowledge systems and subjective views can, and have, become important means of gaining power and resisting dominant discursive practices. It is incumbent on critical scholarship to employ an anti-colonial prism to examine some key issues of African schooling and development, specifically the role of culture, indigenous/local cultural resource knowledge, and education in the search for genuine development and educational options for

the continent (see Dei, 2004). What is needed are critical discursive stances that highlight both the possibilities and limitations of locally centred development, using an anti-colonial prism to point to how local/indigenous peoples use their own creativity and resourcefulness to address broader questions of social development. The reference to anti-colonial thought is relevant in stressing local understandings of the nature and contexts of colonized relations and practices, as well as the recourse to power and subjective agency for resistance and the promotion of genuine *development* (see Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001).

An editorial in the *CODESRIA Bulletin* (1996) identified the major challenges facing African education in the coming years. Among the challenges are "the rehabilitation and regeneration of institutions of learning and research; the renewal and sustenance of agents that produce and reproduce knowledge; the sustenance and enhancement of intellectual leadership, relevance, vitality and integrity and the capacity to transform the disciplines as they contribute to the positive and sustainable transformation of society" (p. 1). This is a tall and daunting order. There are no answers or solutions to these challenges. However, a proper identification of problems and challenges is crucial to the search for genuine solutions. Current patterns and schooling in the African context have not fully delivered on the promise of indigenous *African development*. There are fundamental problems that have to be tackled in earnest if African education is to sustain its historically immeasurable contributions to global knowledge production and human development. African education today struggles to emancipate itself from the tentacles of a colonial past and the stronghold of contemporary external dictates.

This chapter offers a critique and suggestions for alternative education in Africa that would serve foremost (but not exclusively) local needs and aspirations. Externally imposed forms of education have so far failed to critically examine how African indigenous cultural values, traditions, mythology, thought, and history constitute a sufficient body of knowledge about the African social reality and the human condition (see also Gueye, 1995). Current forms of schooling and education on the continent have not adequately addressed the complexity of the interrelationships between nature, culture, society, and the individual. Education has downplayed the acquisition of knowledge based on the interactions between the body, the mind, and the spirit.

In fact, education in Africa today can be said to be in a *crisis*. The *crisis* is rooted in a colonial legacy of often-misguided educational polices and practices (curriculum, texts, pedagogies) that failed to *speak* adequately to the variety of human experiences or to the diverse histories and ideas that have shaped and continue to shape human growth and development. Conventional processes of formal schooling (largely inherited from the colonial past) have only served to reproduce societal inequalities. Although the contemporary *crisis* in education has roots in colonialism, African governments cannot escape blame. Many African leaders, administrators, and educational policy-makers have not done much to change flawed educational policies and practices inherited from the colonialists.

Current educational policies and practices are the dictates of the international financial community. The approach to educational development by these external interests is primarily from the corporate material interests. Educational resources continue to be scarce in part because indigenous materials remain devalued and untapped for improving African education. Consequently, there is a disturbing decline in educational standards and achievements. The need to re-think new forms of schooling and educational options in an African context is more than imperative.

In the web of global knowledge production, African educators have to deal with a long history of European dominance of what constitutes valid and acceptable knowledge and how such knowledge should be produced and disseminated nationally and internationally (see Kelly & Altbach, 1978). This is particularly reflected in mainstream social science in the West as it struggles to shed itself of a negative portrayal African peoples, cultures, and histories. Within the continent itself, schooling and education policies and practices continue to marginalize and oppress local peoples and groups. Fortunately, current resistance to Eurocentric, homophobic, and patriarchal education are expressed in the call for the introduction, validation, and interrogation of *other*/subjugated/oppositional voices and ways of knowing. For current educational changes to have a meaningful impact in Africa, formal, informal, and non-formal learning and teaching systems should recover and reclaim African indigenous cultures and values as a basis for empowering local peoples. The task is not simply to reform existing curriculum and school pedagogical practices. Transformative educational change

must address the internal problems of discrimination, prejudice, bias, and alienation within schools.

Transformational African education must find ways to tap the cultural resource knowledge of local peoples. Such knowledge was very much the hallmark of traditional/indigenous African education. For example, throughout history, African parents and community members have promoted learning among the youth through community- and home-based educational strategies. Colonial education, rather than tapping such local skills and knowledge, chose to devalue and/or neglect homes and community instructional strategies and practices. These strategies constitute an "untapped resource," which could be adapted by educational reformers to advance the education of African youth and all learners in today's schools. Learning from community- and home-based strategies will require creative ways to explore home- and community-based practices that promote successful learning outcomes for youth. It will require an investigation of specific community initiatives that empower youth and encourage open and collaborative learning environments. It will also demand a critical examination of the ways in which community workers can successfully assist in bringing youth learners, adult learners, and the home and community knowledge of parents into the schools.

In the context of this discussion I use the terms "traditional" and "indigenous" interchangeably. As pointed out elsewhere (Dei, 1993) the term "traditional" denotes a continuity of cultural values from past experiences that shape the present, e.g., how indigenous peoples have accommodated their new form of postcolonial experience. African scholars like Muteshi (1996) make a distinction between the "traditional" and the "indigenous" when arguing that the "indigenous" past offers a means of staking out a position as an African that is outside of the identity that has been, and continues to be, constructed in Western/Euro-American ideology. In the broader sense of this chapter, "indigenous" is defined as arising locally, primarily from long-term residents in a given community (see also Fals Borda, 1980; Warren et al., 1995).

A critical African education must come to terms with an interrogation and validation of African experiences and histories, as well as offer a profound critique of the continued exclusion and marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems from global knowledge production. Resisting global knowledge production requires new ways of thinking about schooling and education.

THE CENTRALITY OF CULTURE IN RETHINKING AFRICAN EDUCATION

As repeatedly argued, Western knowledge has been limited by an inability of its Eurocentric theoretical frameworks to adequately adapt to the specificities of different cultures (see Asante, 1987; 1991; Ziegler, 1996). The specificities of cultures should inform social theories that purport to explain the human world. This is because academic and political questions are continually changing to reflect social conditions. There is a plurality of human experiences, and no monolithic or uniform theory can account fully for such diversity. Arguing for grand, totalizing theoretical frameworks that purport to explain away every aspect of human society can be problematic. Educational policy planning in Africa must examine multiple forms of knowledge for comprehensive educational change.

Central to developing alternative, critical ways of rethinking schooling and education in Africa is the understanding of culture. By African *culture*, I refer to the totality of life evolved by African peoples in their attempts to fashion a harmonious co-existence between themselves and the environment, a totality of life that gives order and meaning to social, political, economic, aesthetic, and religious norms (see Vieta, 1991, p. 480). African culture is both indigenous and traditional. Culture constitutes a "dynamic system of norms, values and mental representations" characteristic of a group (Gueye, 1995, p. 8). The norms and values and moral ethos allow the group members to regulate and guide their ways of living and acting.

Forms of schooling and education must adapt to the specificities of cultures. The African belief that no people can exist without a past, without a history, without a way of life, and without a culture is fundamental to rethinking education and schooling. Educational relevance is defined by how the model/style of instruction, pedagogy, and curricular change account for, and emerges from, culture. That is, education that is able to account for the real life of the people who live in the African world. In the African world all things are interconnected. Education is connected to economy, religion, society, and politics. Notwithstanding the sites and sources of disempowerment for women and ethnic, linguistic, and cultural minorities embedded in African cultures and traditions, I would argue that there is much

to learn by way of making African education relevant to the needs of society through a critical interrogation of traditional cultural ethos, norms and values, and systems of thought.

Discussing the role of culture in African schooling and education brings forth some interesting questions and concerns. For example, how does the saliency of culture in African knowledge production and use assist local peoples to meet contemporary challenges of development? How does the critical examination of African culture(s) reveal a body of indigenous science knowledge relevant for African social development and Western and global knowledge? (see Ogunniyi, 1986; Bates et al., 1993). How do we resource education in the current economic circumstances of abject poverty? How is it possible to develop sustained institutional infrastructures in Africa to serve as centres of academic excellence that would promote indigenous culture and science and contribute to global science knowledge? What are the roles of the state as the sole or main provider of educational resources?

CULTURE, SCIENCE, AND EDUCATION

Culture constitutes the values, norms, and moral ethos that determine and/or influence the mentalities and behaviours of a people. There is a powerful connection between human action and culture. Gueye (1995) enthuses the idea that Africans must reflect on *science*, *culture*, and *development* through an integrative approach in order to produce genuine social transformation. The study of African cultures and cultural values reveal a body of indigenous scientific thought that is relevant in the promotion of social development. The search for genuine educational and social transformation in Africa demands the promotion of indigenous African science knowledge.

One problem in promoting African science knowledge is moving away from a Eurocentric definition of what constitutes *science and technology*. The erroneous assertion that Africa has no indigenous science persists (see Maddock, 1981). Historically, this assertion made it possible to superimpose or privilege Western science over indigenous African science. Science and technology cannot simply

be associated with Western societies and their knowledge systems. In fact, as Jegede (1994) observes, "because science and technology are part of human culture, every society has some type of science and technology in one form or another" (p. 127). Variations among societies appear in the way science is conceived, taught, and applied to solve human problems.

There is an indigenous African science and technology which constitutes a body of knowledge to be taught in African schools (see also Thisen, 1993). An African *science* is more than a "modality of human activity investment which consists of producing objective knowledge based on the discovery of laws in the various areas of reality [which enable humans to] give a rational account [and] anticipation of events and phenomena" (Gueye, 1995, p. 8). African science extends beyond the development of "critical mind, strong commitment to truth(s), [and a] capacity to innovate and rapidly assimilate innovations" (p. 9). African science is a body of knowledge that integrates an understanding of nature, society, and culture to produce human thought and affect behaviour and action. Science is part of the belief system of a people.

Science knowledge is appropriately understood in the context of the surrounding environment. Science knowledge is relevant if it produces information about the immediate environment to explain everyday phenomena. Science education can be conceived as "a cultural and human enterprise involving the transmission of cultural heritage of a people" (Jegede, 1994, p. 123, citing Gallagher and Dawson, 1984, and Maddock, 1981). The beginning of science, as Urevbu (1984) has aptly remarked, should focus on socially relevant issues that hinge on human activity and action.

African science is built on African indigenous cultural knowledge and thought. As African educators search for innovative ways to integrate indigenous thought and practices with Western science and technology, the examination of traditional culture becomes significant (see also Yakubu, 1994). In rural African communities, one can witness the co-existence of indigenous culture and *foreign/external* cultures through the processes of globalization. African education can seek a harmonization of local cultural beliefs and values (associated with indigenous systems of thought) and so-called modern science knowledge (Jegede 1994, p. 120).

The effective promotion of a dynamic African science and technology rests on developing an institutional framework to tap into available scientific and technological knowledge and expertise for social development, for example, by developing educational infrastructures to serve as viable academic centres, which advance learning, research, and training into indigenous knowledges, practices of health and medicine, local textile printing, woodworking, and other arts and crafts. A major drawback of endogenous African development, as Thisen (1993) sees it, is the fact that "science and technology have been construed as high level of scientific research and manpower, while the application of available, on the shelf, science and technology has been ignored" (p. 6). As Thisen (1993) observes, social development depends on the transformation and exploitation of the natural surroundings. Africa must, therefore, find ways to tap and utilize its available scientific culture in the process of national development.

African educators have a challenge to bring traditional knowledge, thought, and practices into school science (see Horton, 1971). Teaching of science should place emphasis on the relation between the material and the experiential world of study, rather than on sheer facts and the "rote memorization and regurgitation" of abstract principles (Jegede, 1994, p. 126). Science education in African should "identify and use the fundamental scientific and technological principles, theories, and concepts of the indigenous practices" within local communities (Jegede, 1994, p. 126). For example, the school science curriculum should teach about indigenous knowledge governing farming practices, food-processing techniques, medicinal preparation of herbs, as well as knowledge about disease and prevention of illnesses. Schools should also teach about African spiritual cosmology as a form of indigenous science knowledge. Educational strategies should promote effective adult education that allows youth and adult learners to share indigenous knowledge in school settings. The eventual success of such practices would depend also on how the long-standing problems of science education in Africa are addressed at local, regional, and national levels, for example, dealing with the problems of poor laboratory facilities, the dearth of qualified science and technology personnel, poorly trained teachers, the poor quality of research, and the low enrolment of pupils in science classes (see Urevbu, 1984; Thisen, 1993).

RETHINKING AFRICAN EDUCATION AND THE AFRICAN INDIGENOUS SYSTEM OF THOUGHT

In speaking about African indigenous systems of thought, I want to acknowledge that there are some important questions about definitions and operationalization of boundaries as well as contestations about what constitute such knowledge forms. I would assert that different African cultural knowledge systems have a long history going back well in time and are significant for implying the intellectual agency of subjects. Unfortunately, as noted, the local resource base of African people has been the least analyzed for its contribution to genuine development. I view indigenous knowledge as constituting a part of the quest for multiple ways of knowing in the academy. When placed in a broader context as a way to rethink schooling and education in pluralistic communities of Africa and elsewhere, indigenous epistemology heavily implicates and is implicated by, Western colonialist and neo-colonialist practices of educational delivery. Thus the space and the scope of the chapter could be to engage learners, activists, policy-makers, and developers.

For example, it is common knowledge that local African proverbs, parables, tales, folklore, fables, myths, and mythologies contain words of wisdom and important information about society and its peoples and the interactions of culture and nature. These different lines of cultural knowledge have a long history and are connected to the traditions of local communities and their understandings of the social and natural worlds. Such local knowledge systems are significant for implying the intellectual agency of subjects. The current discourse of *African renaissance* is located in the need to reflect on past experiences and histories and to utilize locally contextualized, cultural knowledge to respond to contemporary problems. This does not mean recourse to a mythical or romanticized past, but rather the realization that the past, a people's history, culture, and local cultural resource base have a role to play in the search for answers to daily concerns and problems. Furthermore, the assertion of local voice is a necessary exercise in resisting domination and colonial imposition. In the African context I am using "indigenous" and "local" interchangeably to denote the complexity, dynamism, and variegated nature of knowledge systems. The use of the "local" is to gesture to

how cultural norms and values (as local traditions) shape knowledge systems of communities and help offer interpretations of social existence. "Local" and "indigenous" both allude to the relevance of knowledge for particular contexts and how such knowledge can be viewed as a process of connecting place, time, and space in such a way that nothing is shown to be fixed, static, and unchanging.

There are important ethnic, class, regional, age, and gender particularities in African worldviews. The actual practices ensuing from African systems of thought and social values do vary from community to community. Furthermore, cultural values and traditions are never static or frozen in time and space. The "traditional" is not a frozen past. Tradition and the past do indeed influence the present. Life may be located in the past but is experienced in the present. Contemporary events, such as, *traffic in cultures*, *commoditization of cultures*, and/or the globalization of knowledge, continue to have far-reaching implications for social and educational change. The transformation of African communal moral values or systems of thought, to serve the needs of corporate capital, is a case in point. However, these developments and observations do not deny the efficacy of an African worldview as analytically and conceptually distinct from a Eurocentric, imperial, and hierarchal body of knowledge.

Elsewhere I have pointed out that, within the indigenous cultures, the African humanness as a value system speaks to the importance of relating to, rather than mastery over, nature and the social environment (Dei, 1994). The indigenous African sense of being human speaks about the wholeness of human relationships, compassion, hospitality, and generosity. It is thus problematic to ignore the cultural resource base of African peoples and its contributions to both the process and objective of social development (see also Ayittey, 1991).

A new praxis of African education could legitimize the idea that school knowledge must speak to the African human condition. Social knowledge about Africa must critique an educational system that encourages a dualistic mode of thought and seek the development of the individualist rather than the co-operative instincts of humankind. African education must resurrect the values of the co-operative individual who belongs to, and is enriched by, the group or community. This powerful ideology need to be reaffirmed in the learning processes of schools. Paraphrasing Freire (1990, pp. 57–74), African education must seek the incorporation of a tradition that stresses group work

and support as opposed to an ideology of competitiveness, rugged individualism, and individual culpability.

In rethinking schooling and education in Africa, educators cannot lose sight of the common underlying themes of traditional cultures that are still very much evident in many rural African communities today. The themes of communal solidarity, collective rights and social responsibilities, mutual interdependence, respect for the elderly, and a human communion with the spiritual world could form the foundation on which to develop a new praxis of African education in the contemporary era of Euro-American capital hegemony.

Following on the pioneering works of Wiredu (1980), Mbiti (1982), Hountondji (1983), Gyekye (1987), Mudimbe (1988), Okpewho (1992), Oladipo (1992), and Tedla (1995) [among many others], I have selected twelve basic principles of African cultural knowledge as forming the basis of an African system of thought (see also Dei, 1996, pp. 96–98). These principles are interrelated and are not discussed in any order of importance:

1. All knowledge is accumulated knowledge, based on observing and experiencing the social and natural worlds. There is no marketplace for ideas, i.e., knowledge that can be bought or sold in the Eurocentric sense. This principle recognizes the link between knowledge and experience. It also takes the position that there is no sole authority on knowledge. The fact of cultural and political repositories of traditional knowledge in communities does not necessarily imply individual or group exclusive ownership of, and control over, the process of knowledge production and dissemination.

2. We are all learners of the social and natural world and social learning has to be personalized in order to develop the intuitive and analytical aspects of the human mind. In other words, every way of knowing is subjective and based in part on experiential knowledge. Such personal subjective identification with the learning processes makes it possible for the individual to be invested spiritually and emotionally in the cause of social change. It is particularly emphasized that the acquisition of knowledge is a process of interactions between the body, the mind, and the human spirit. The action of thought itself is a causal factor in social action.

3. All knowledge is socially and collectively created through the interactive processes between individuals, groups, and the natural world. This principle does not attribute knowledge acquisition simply to individual acumen, talent, or the limits of one's own senses. Knowledge comes from individuals, family, and communal interactions, as well as through the interactive processes with nature. The principle involves the collective activities of the social group, as well as natural and spiritual forces of the world (e.g., power of the ancestors and gods).

4. Humans are part of the natural world. We do not stand apart and neither are we above the natural world. This principle affirms that our basic humanness is a value system that speaks to the importance of relating to, rather than dominating, nature and the environment. This humanness stresses points of conciliation, rather than presenting the universe as a world to be studied and dominated.

5. To understand one's social reality is to have a holistic view of society. It is conceded that the social, political, and religious structures of society are connected to each other and that we cannot separate politics from economics, culture, religion, cosmology, family, and kinship.

6. History and social change are processes that do not completely lie outside the purview and power of human agency. While the act of change itself is sacred, humans nevertheless can predict and cause social change with the blessing of the powers of the natural world (e.g., ancestral spirits).

7. Both our social and natural worlds are full of uncertainties. There is no certainty in any knowledge. Every way of knowing is clouded by some uncertainty about the social and natural worlds. Humans do not need to strive to explain away everything about their world.

8. Humans do not possess the Earth. It is argued that all living beings have borrowed the Earth from the ancestors and that the living would incur the wrath of the ancestors if they destroyed nature in the process of satisfying societal and individual material needs.

9. The concept of the individual only makes sense in relation to the community of which he or she is part; the collective spirit is stronger than the individual mind. The uniqueness of the individual is recognized in terms of his or her personality, spiritual essence, talents, and *des-*

tiny. However, it is argued that such individuality must be defined and placed in the wider social and political contexts (see also Bray et al., 1986; Semali & Stambach 1995). In other words, the self is also the community. The individual is not a full person without relationship to the community (Mbiti, 1969, p. 214). The community works together as a functioning whole.

10. To every individual or group right in society is married some fundamental responsibilities. The philosophical argument is that no one gets something for nothing and that one has to give back that which is received so that others may benefit.

11. Every life form exists in paired relationships (see also Holmes, 1995, for the Hawaiian). The principle also recognizes that humans live in a continuous rather than a fixed linear time frame. Thus there are no such fine distinctions in life (as in young/old, individual/communal, mind/body, personal/political, and social/natural). To deal with these facts of life, it is contended that humans need a non-dualistic mode of thought that balances all social and natural relationships. In other words, indigenous ways of knowing are not based on fragmented categories.

12. Knowledge and survival go hand in hand. In other words, we cannot separate theory from practice. The key to human survival is the ability of society to pass knowledge down through generations by cultural transmission and through teaching by example and practice (e.g., community work and action).

These principles of the African knowledge system have relevance for educational pedagogy, curricular development, and reform of educational equity and accessibility, as well as for educational policy accountability and transparency. In particular, the idea of collective and multiple origins of knowledge means the search for new forms of schooling and education in the African context will require policymakers, educational practitioners and theorists, parents, students, and learners to all work together.

Genuine educational transformation in Africa must be informed by effective policy decisions. A politics of accountability must be eschewed as part of any political strategy for educational accessibility, inclusion, and relevance. African leaders, administrators and policy-

makers, and their international allies have to re-examine the socio-economic and political implications of current economic measures that impact directly and indirectly on education.

Rethinking African education means finding appropriate ways to address all forms educational inequities in the educational system. These inequities are structured along ethnic/racial, gender, regional, language, religious, and class lines in Africa. Gender is a key area of educational inequity in Africa. Research shows that illiteracy among women in Africa is about 70 per cent on the average and more than 90 per cent in rural areas. The general school dropout rate is higher for girls; women are under-represented in the subject fields of mathematics, sciences, and technology (Njeuma 1993, p. 123; Woodhouse & Ndongko, 1993). Added to this is the feminization of poverty in Africa, which exacerbates educational chances of females. These should be pressing concerns for all.

Addressing inequities extends beyond the availability of material resources to a political and moral commitment to fight educational injustice. Issues of academic excellence and educational equity are inextricably linked.

CONCLUSION

In rethinking schooling and education in Africa, perhaps it is helpful for us to explore the place of indigenous knowledge systems in our rapidly globalizing world by discussing the relevance of such knowledge for the academy. Such a perspective views indigenous knowledge as constituting a part of the quest for multiple ways of knowing about and understanding our world. It also emphasizes the importance of teaching to link the project of indigenous knowledge systems with politics of development, global poverty alleviation, and the trend known as globalization.

While the ideas presented in this chapter may be applicable in an African context, I am mindful of the fact that the issues have broader implications for schooling and learning in other colonized and pluralistic spaces. By most accounts, such spaces are heavily implicated by Western colonialism and colonialist practices of educational delivery.

It is significant that discourses that subvert dominant thinking speak to different local and international audiences in addition to those in fields of education and academic learning. Hopefully the ensuing discussion can engage a wide audience of learners, activists, policymakers, and developers interested in questions of pedagogy, education, history, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, and international development. We must see knowledge production in the domain of education as broadly defined.

Academic excellence is not easily attainable, nor can it be made equitable, within an environment in which national economic policies squeeze the masses at the same time as corporate and international capital interests soar. At the heart of this concern is the role of the African state in ensuring that schooling and education serve the needs and aspirations of all peoples. A rethinking of the role of the African state as the sole or main provider of education is called for. There must be alternative ways of distributing education in the current circumstances of World Bank and IMF-inspired structural adjustment policies that are reaping untold havoc on local peoples. While a discussion of the appropriate roles of the state is a crucial part of rethinking schooling and education in African contexts, the learning objective of this chapter is to urge for a reliance on local creativity and resourcefulness. Such reliance could provide some answers to the mounting problems and challenges of transcending adjustment for African education.

A relevant education is one that is anchored in cultural experience and historical cultural knowledge. African education must serve the socio-cultural, economic, and political needs of local communities. To do so, curriculum and pedagogical strategies need to be reformed. Curriculum reform will entail, among many other things, the use of local knowledge and expertise and the conduct of communicative and discursive practices that have at the centre the African experience and condition. Rethinking African education demands that educational practitioners, theorists, and policy-makers examine the instructional and learning processes in classrooms and other school settings. They must critique outdated pedagogical approaches and suggest new instructional styles to enable the youth develop critical thinking skills. Transformative pedagogies must assist youth and adult learners to empower themselves.

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Notes

1   This chapter was first published as "Education for development: Relevance and implications for African development." *Canadian Journal of Development Studies, 19*(3), 1998, 509–27. The current version has some updated reference citations.

2   In the context of this discussion, I distinguish between "schooling" and "education." "Schooling" refers to the formal structures and procedures of going to school. "Education" is broadly defined to refer to the options, strategies, processes, and structures through which we (as individuals and communities/groups) come to know and understand the world and act within it. "Education" happens at/in multiple sites and contexts – schools, universities, workplaces, homes, communities, arts and media) – with a diverse body of participants involved. It could be argued that in the contemporary African context there is too much schooling with too little education taking place (see also Shujaa, 1994a, b; in another context).