

Indigenous anti-colonial knowledge as 'heritage knowledge' for promoting Black/African education in diasporic contexts

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Abstract

This paper addresses some serious questions in the discussions around Black/African diasporic education: As African scholars how do we begin to pioneer new analytical systems for understanding our local/Indigenous communities and what are the challenges we are likely to be faced with? What are the intellectual and political merits of developing and promoting our own “home grown Indigenous perspectives steeped in culture-specific paradigms” (Yankah, 2004, p. 26) in the Western academy? This is an opportunity and a challenge in the struggle to save myself/ourselves from becoming “intellectual imposter[s]”, simply good at mimicking dominant theories and knowledges (Nyamnjoh, 2012) in the [Western] academy. We need to replace our ‘cultural estrangement’ with a ‘cultural engagement’ in the pursuit and promotion of African/Black education in Diasporic contexts. For African learners we need develop theoretical prisms or perspectives that are able to account for our lived experiences and our relationality with other learners, prisms rooted in our cultures, histories and heritage. I intervene in the discussion through transgressive pedagogies, by way of Indigenous epistemologies, to seek different ways for educational transformation for all learners. I borrow the ideas of pioneering Black/African scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois and Franz Fanon as I articulate an ‘Indigenist anti-colonial’ framework for understanding issues of Black/African education for the ‘global good’. I use my long standing work in the Canadian school system to ground issues in the discussion. Nyamnyoh (2012) notes, in writing about the Diasporic encounter, that as those who move and/or are forced to move, we cannot position ourselves simply in relation to those we meet on

the journey. We must stake out our own discursive and political positions. We must be true to our authentic selves as African subjects of knowing.

Keywords: *anti-colonial, decolonization, Indigeneity, heritage knowledge, schooling, Black education*

Introduction: Situating the intellectual and political challenge

Of late, I have been thinking seriously about some questions: As African scholars how do we pioneer new analytical systems for understanding our Indigenous communities and what are the challenges we are likely to be faced with? What are the intellectual and political merits of developing and promoting our own “home-grown Indigenous perspectives steeped in culture-specific paradigms” (Yankah, 2004, p. 26) in the Western academy? Admittedly, I see this opportunity as an important challenge in the struggle to save ourselves from becoming “intellectual imposters” (Nyamnjoh, 2012) in the academy. For a start we can work on replacing our ‘cultural estrangement’ with ‘cultural engagement’ in the pursuit and promotion of African/Black education in Diasporic contexts.

In thinking through this topic, I find it imperative to reiterate that in the current epoch of globalization and advance capitalism, schooling and education have become discursively configured to meet the needs of modernization from the context of Euromodernity. For African learners we need to develop theoretical prisms or perspectives that are able to account for our lived experiences and our relationality with other learners. Such prisms will be rooted in our cultures, histories and heritage and be presented as frames of reference for the intellectual and political projects of designing positive (i.e., solution-oriented) educational goals for learners.

From curricula to pedagogies, dominant knowledge systems have been organized and inscribed through governing Eurocentric paradigms historically augured within colonial specificities. Education systems and processes, as well as ideas about what counts as education, have been entrenched in the reproduction of colonial ways of knowing which concomitantly limit possibilities for many learners. By way of my own personal educational experience, I have written how my colonial education in Ghana taught me less about my own communities than other distant places, which made it difficult to relate education to my lived experiences. Cultural community knowledges were not affirmed in my education and it has taken many years of struggle to shed the Eurocentric gaze and interpretations that have been ingrained in my thinking. Many of us, whether as Indigenous, colonized or racially minoritized scholars/learners, continue to struggle to convey liberatory ways of understanding for/in different socio-cultural, economical and political spaces. For education to facilitate rather than limit learning possibilities and educational transformation, it is crucial that we develop and apply liberatory conceptual frameworks that are accessible to learners.

With this in mind, I intervene in the discussion through transgressive pedagogies, by way of Indigenous epistemologies, to seek different and effective concepts, theories and processes for educational transformation for all learners. In producing knowledge as theory, I recognize that the worth of any social theory must be measured both by its philosophical grounding, as well as its ability to offer a social and political corrective. This point speaks to the notion of consciousness and responsibility to/of producing, sharing, claiming, and gaining knowledge. Being knowledge producers makes us deeply implicated in colonial power relations and means that we have a responsibility to consider the foundations and consequences of our work. An important theoretical supposition that frames my own academic scholarship is that the transformation of social realities must start with re-conceptualizing education, e.g., asking new questions about the whats, hows, and whys of education. Specifically, it is important for us to ask: What sorts of education should be taking place in our schools today? How do learners of today come to know using multiple lenses of critical inquiry? Given that no one tells the full story, how do we tell and understand multiple stories that, all considered, help us to understand the whole story? How do learners read and understand our worlds in different ways and share such multiple knowings as ‘communities of learners’?

Such questions are important if education is to be understood as living and working with ideas of freedom, growth, or social change. These questions also help to challenge the dominance of one particular story or particular stories over others. Our institutions of learning, as sites for education of young learners and adults, must liberate all knowledges. Our educational institutions cannot be places for mere survival[ism] for learners and educators. We must see our schools as sites of contestations – over knowledge, power and social transformation (see Ladson-Billings, 2011). In this paper, therefore, I affirm the centrality of local cultural ways of knowing and local voices in the dialogue on education, as broadly defined.

The cultural knowledge challenge

How have I come to understand ‘African Heritage Knowledge’? No doubt culture as a social system is at the roots of coming to know. I see African heritage knowledge as a cultural fund of the individual and collective knowledge of African peoples, which has endured through time and draws on a critical linkage of culture, race and politics in coming to know. In this context race is engaged critically as part of our identities (class, gender, sexuality, disability, sexuality, etc) and importantly linked with knowledge production. This knowledge speaks to a politicized affirming of culture and race (as opposed to the problematic denial of the significance of race, and the purposeful racial labeling intended for negative/oppressive ends) as well as the affirmation of cultural identity (see also Ivy, 1959; King, 2005).

As poignantly asked at the beginning of this paper: How do we African scholars stop ourselves from becoming “intellectual imposters” in the Western academy? In other words, how do we work and hold ourselves accountable, to be ourselves and to exercise our intellectual agencies? The Eurocentric mimicry usually comes at emotional, psychological, mental and

material costs to us individually and collectively. Writing in African contexts and specifically about African scholarship, Nyamnjoh (2012) writes about colonial education as “cultural violence, self-hate and mimicry” (p. 4). African scholarship, research and knowledge production must help us to recover and reclaim ourselves, our knowledges and our voices. The difficult question is how to do this. This is about more than challenging and subverting “epistemological imperialism”. It is about rooting knowledges and practices into their appropriate soils, cultural contexts, histories and heritages. That is, in addition to resisting colonial education and knowledges, it is important to work, learn, and engage in knowledge production, sharing and critical inquiry in contexts that affirm or are suitable given the histories, heritages and cultures that shape our ways of understanding the world. There is a need for a rebirth of Indigenous epistemologies informed by local languages, perspectives, social values, cosmologies and worldviews (see also Nyamnjoh, 2012, p. 10).

Rather than being dismissive of culture we must replace our ‘cultural estrangement’ with a critical ‘cultural engagement’. Within the literature there are psychological, sociological and/or anthropological points of view reinforcing the relevance of the culture, pedagogy, and education linkage. For example, as I have noted elsewhere (Dei, 2012a), the works of Clifford (1986), Geertz (1993), Cole (1992; 2006), Rogoff (1981, 2003), Wertsch (1985, 2002) and Tappan (2006). Within anthropology Clifford (1986) and Geertz (1993) demonstrate how knowledge is embedded within particular cultural contexts and resists appeals to master narratives, transcendent experiences, or a universal 'human nature'. Not only do appeals to universal ways of knowing ignore the diversity of human experiences and cultures, but they work within inequitable power frameworks to privilege Western ways of knowing. These authors argue that culture is at the essence of all human experience and is central to knowledge production. We should expect ‘multi-epistemes’ (Cajete, 2000) to emerge given the diversity of cultures involved in educational contexts.

Within psychology, Rogoff (1981, 2003) details the marked differences in human development across cultures and examines how individuals develop as participants in their cultural communities. This engagement of individuals and cultural communities is necessarily dynamic and refutes the view of culture as static and having the same effect on each individual. Individuals relate differently to their cultures but they are guided by shared understandings of the cultural systems and expectations and social roles of each constituent member of their cultures. Thus we can understand culture as a system of shared knowledge. Wertsch (1985, 2002) further examines the complex relationships between individuals and culture. In his work, he extrapolates on how cultural tools are taken up to mediate the formulation of a collective memory. This mediation works through the complex interactions between individuals and their social, cultural, and historical communities as well as surrounding natural and physical environments. Similarly, Tappan (2006) extends Wertsch's ideas around cultural mediation by examining moral development as the accumulation of cultural tools and moral mediation means, which allow the individual to operate and make choices as part of the community.

Molefi Asante's long standing work [among many others] firmly grounds African culture in understand the African human condition (Asante, 1991, 2003). Affirming the centrality of African culture offers intellectual and discursive agency to the learner and recognition of their responsibilities to a larger community. Culture is a powerful lens for reading the African world - it is the starting point for discussion of knowledge production, identity, and development. Culture is not necessarily as much about sameness as it is about a shared body of knowledge. Culture is about identity, history and constitutes a form of pedagogy. Culture is also hotly contested and is saturated with power. It is the complex engagements of the individual within and with the dynamic entity of culture that shapes who they are and how they come to know the world. What these authors are pointing to is the fact that culture influences human and social action in very complex ways.

This cursory look at selected literature suggests that the engagement of local culture/cultural knowings demonstrates the power of culturally-contextualized discourses to transcend geographical/physical borders and boundaries in the delivery of effective education to learners. Educators need to put new pedagogical approaches and classroom instructional practices in place to address schooling challenges and to ensure safe, secure and healthy learning environments for learners. Cultural paradigms shape the construction of particular knowledges, as well as experiences of schooling. The work of African educators (research, writing and teachings) must affirm Indigenous/African cultures, while pointing to the creativity, resourcefulness, agency and value systems of our cultural knowledges. We must challenge current intellectual posture, which sees how we come to know and understand our relations through the prism of the dominant. For example, as Nyamnyoh (2012, p. 2) notes in writing about the colonial and Diasporic encounter, those of us who move and/or are forced to move cannot position ourselves simply in relation to those we meet along the way or on the journey; we must stake out our own positions as well. We must be true to our authentic selves as African subjects of knowing. We also need to appreciate and work with the fact that there is knowledge beyond the capacity of the human senses to comprehend and/or render what is observable or not (see also Nyamnyoh, 2012, p. 4). This is the idea of uncertainty of knowledge, where there is no inclination to dominate other knowledges through certainty. Rather, there is an inclination and need to create spaces for our knowledges to be considered and critically examined on our own terms, free from dominating perspectives. We must understand the Indigenous reality or condition on its own terms through an anti-colonial intellectuality and praxis (Abraham, 2011). To understand the Indigenous reality we must go to the Indigenous source for knowledge and not rely on theories and theorists elsewhere whose work speaks to different realities.

In the pursuit of anti-colonial intellectuality and praxis we must use local cultural sources of knowledge to resist the everyday devaluation, denial and negation of the creativity, agency, resourcefulness and knowledge systems of African peoples. It is so important that, as we seek to decolonize ourselves and the academy, we develop an anti-colonial intellectuality that helps us to challenge and subvert the colonial mappings and colonial cartographies of our institutions of learning. The relations of politics to territoriality must be understood as far more complex than

who owns and is entitled to certain spaces. It is also fundamentally about the particular and intellectual praxis that coming into a given space/land requires us to uphold. We must understand the relations of political power and geographical and social spaces, as well as the strategic importance of land as a place of affirmation of histories, identities, and cultures of resistance. Anti-colonial intellectuality and praxis is about bringing ideas into fruition as social practice, as grounding and testing theories in the contexts of the liberatory struggles of our peoples as well as the people with whom we work in political solidarity (these must include the Indigenous peoples on whose land we currently reside). Recognizing the links among culture, knowledge production, and colonization of land and space, as African diasporic subjects our development of anti-colonial knowledge production and intellectualities should remain rooted in histories, cultures, and revolutionary political traditions of African people's radical resistance to colonialism. Our work benefits from rich legacies of committed and visionary political action and our theories must be sophisticated enough to broach and sustain good political practice. We must challenge the ways discourses and bodies of knowledges are controlled, policed, regimented, selected, organized and distributed in our academies and public spaces without any grounding in meaningful or concrete political practice. Anti-colonial intellectuality does not remain abstract - it does not rely on separation of body, mind, and spirit - and in its integrity it necessarily involves a worldsense and lifestyle that actively threatens oppressive power structures. Anti-colonial education should strengthen and be strengthened by the development of effective personal and collective decolonizing practices as well as our involvement in collective political struggles against all forms of oppression.

Education for 'global good' is education for responsible global citizenry. However, dominant conceptions of global [citizenship] education is often easily touted for its virtues of the global interdependence of our worlds, commitment to fundamental freedoms and rights of all peoples, for acknowledgement of cultural diversity, tolerance of intercultural differences, and the belief in the efficacy and power of individual action (see Mundy and Manion, 2008; Wright, 2011). But where is the recognition of the necessity to deal concretely with power, privilege and our relative complicities in ensuring colonial and oppressive education and global structural inequities? When counter-narratives, knowledges and oppositional voices are raised, they are often ridiculed or responded to with threats, violence, erasure, or plain dismissiveness - as is often the case of the subjectification of Indigenous knowledges as a "racial subset of knowledge" (Battiste and Youngblood Henderson, 2000). Education for the 'global good' and responsible global citizenry in the context of an oppressive status quo must involve anti-oppression.

Producing counter/oppositional knowledge for transformation of Black/African education is about building critical social theory. Theory cannot remain a privileged discussion among so-called academics and intellectuals that fails to evoke or be directly informed by anti-oppressive actions and practice. There is the necessity to create discursive frameworks that affirm the inseparability of theory and practices, to create what can be called a definitional power of anti-colonialism. Our power to define our world on our own terms is related to the extent to which we understand anti-oppressive theories and practices as essentially inseparable. The power of

textuality and idealism can be strengthened and combined with deep historical inquiry, critical reflection, and an understanding and interpretation of our material existence. All knowledges have profound material consequences and our material conditions ground our knowledges.

As Fanon (1963, 1967) noted, no jargon can substitute for reality, and even the colonialist knows this fact. Oppressed, colonized and racial minority scholars must challenge our investments in colonial conceptualizations of intellectuality and admit that we cannot achieve academic and social excellence in our communities by mimicking colonial standards of what counts as ‘intellectual’. To this end, I agree with Abraham (2011) that we must “conceptualize our intellectuality on our own terms” (p. 15) and Lebakeng’s (2010) exhortation that our intellectuality cannot in all sincerity be decoupled from a ‘sociality and polity’. Community is shared space, thought and body. It is a collective more powerful than a sea of individuals. The power of community (however defined) prevails over the fragmentation of individuals, each locked in her/his own subjectivity and discursive agency. Fanon is right in noting that the struggle and contestation over knowledge can only take place in the field of [intellectual] ‘combat’. As Abraham (2011) notes, Fanon “uses the notion of combat to indicate the colonized intellectual’s mental decolonization as a result of direct involvement in collective liberation struggle” (p. 17-18). This is not a fight for individuals or individualism. It is within this field of ‘combat’ that we sow the seeds of our own collective decolonization.

Dubois, Fanon and the question of Black education

In this section, I want to borrow the ideas of pioneering Black/African scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois and Franz Fanon as I articulate an ‘Indigenous anti-colonial framework’ (or what one of my graduate students recently labeled an ‘Indigenist anti-colonial’ framework - Sium, 2011) for understanding issues of Black/African education for ‘global good’.

I use my long-standing work in the Canadian school system to ground some issues because educational research and policy relating to Black/African Canadian education leaves much to be desired. First, there is the disturbing history of simply adding ‘African’ stories to a weak foundation. As educators and policy-makers, how can we hope to address a nagging [and unacceptable] problem of schools failing some learners when our solutions have been to simply add to what already exists? We have to recognize that we cannot simply add new floors/structures to the currently crumbling building that is education until we address the cracks in the foundation. To ensure Black/African educational success, we must seriously consider and begin working on creating new educational systems and alternatives that hold the promise of excellence for all. Second, we cannot expect success while reproducing an unsatisfactory status quo or while continuing to do the same things that are failing us. Third, we need to redouble efforts at creating a level playing field. This means addressing the ‘poverty of school culture’. This explicit investment in a level playing field recognizes the unlevel and inequitable circumstances in which education is embedded – the *a priori* inequality exists among students, within school culture, within educational discourse at many levels, and with Euro-American

curricula. Fourth, there are multiple complicities in the making of the 'educational crisis'. It appears that even many of those people who are quick to point to a 'crisis' do not always easily acknowledge the systemic undercurrents and causes of the crisis. Talk of institutional responsibility for failed systems of schooling and the ways current education is delivered to create educational failure is often muted or denied. Fifth, is the total neglect of the works of African scholars and educators in shaping public policy about Black/African education. We do have tremendous amount of research literature by Black and minority scholars on the school system and yet one has to ask: whose voices are being privileged in scholarly work and school policymaking? Research by Black and minority scholars - research that is crucial for understanding the school system's failure to appropriately serve Black/African and minority students - is usually not taken seriously or ignored altogether. This reflects the coloniality and racism of the school system.

Sixth, is the unquestioned faith in integration. Integration [as we know it] has not led to success for our youth, so we must be critical and ask: Integration for whom, how and at what/whose expense? Increasingly, at the policy level, I am perplexed by the blind faith in integration, even while it leads our youth along the path of cultural destruction and to what Maulana Karenga identified as the 'cultural crisis' (Karenga, cited in Asante, 2009). We need to be asking some critical questions. For many of our youth, 'education sucks'. Interrogating policy and practice to decolonize education for our youth starts by asking four simple questions: a) Who is making educational policies? b) What are the particular experiences that policy makers bring to their work? c) What theoretical perspectives shape the ideas of these policy makers? and, d) Whose interests have conventional educational policies served? Finally, I see a 'return to the source' as imperative. It is important to know where we are coming from in order to know where we are going. I invoke the West African symbol of the 'Sankofa' bird who is looking around behind to see where he is going. The search for new answers can only succeed if we carefully dissect and understand what has failed us in the years before. We must come to understand what practices and ways of knowing are liberatory for our learners, what conditions make those practices and ways of knowing possible, and how to use these to build effective education systems. This, I argue, has everything to do with reclaiming Indigenous African ways of knowing for promoting African education.

W.E.B. Du Bois (1965) in his *The World and Africa*, articulated four crucial points for the cause and direction of Black/African anti-colonial intellectualism and education (see also [Diawara, 1996](#)). Du Bois argued that a) the history and cultures of peoples of Africa and African descent need to be written as a necessary intellectual exercise for our decolonization; b) the search for knowledge about the African cause is valuable if it allows Africans in the Diaspora to identify with the continent and to place Africa on an equal footing with Europe, Asia, and North America; c) it is important for us to posit "Africa's humanism and rich heritage as a compelling argument against racism and colonialism" ([Diawara 1996](#)) and, d) that Black/African peoples everywhere would not be completely free until Africa was liberated and emancipated in [an anti-colonial] modernity. These ideas are central to articulating an Indigenous anti-colonial prism for

understanding Black education. African educators need to write and speak our histories of struggle in our children's education as an exercise in the development of decolonized African education. There are important lessons about traditional/pre-colonial and Indigenous African education that are very relevant to the promotion of education of youth in Diasporic contexts. These lessons make it possible for us to strike the continuities and similarities of African and Diasporic experiences (e.g., the central role of the family and community in youth education; education as about culture, language and heritage, etc.). Indigenous African humanistic thought about community, peace, belonging, solidarity, mutual interdependence and shared destinies is a counterpoint to the denial and negation of our knowledges and experiences, as well as the practice of racial oppression, injustices and inequities that African learners experience and contend with in the mainstream Euro-American school system. We pursue anti-colonial education not simply in affirmation and self-defence of our knowledges and experiences, but also to liberate our selves, bodies and minds from Eurocentric mimicry.

Franz Fanon wrote about the importance, imperative and urgency of extricating ourselves from Euro-colonial modernity when he asserted poignantly “each generation must come out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it” (Fanon, 1967, p. 206). He speaks to our responsibility as Black/Indigenous scholars, educators, researchers and community workers to discover and fulfill our mission. Fanon’s critique of the Negritude Movement in terms of seeking currency for the Black/African body through a negotiation of White colonial spaces and an uncritical evocation of the African past/culture/tradition is equally informative. There is a concern about engaging in an unending colonial mimicry and Fanon offers an opportunity to rethink transformative pedagogy and education. While the importance of Fanon for schooling, education and pedagogy have largely been underexplored, we need to read Fanon's work as more than a mere theoretical exercise. Instead, we must read this African anti-colonial scholar politically, practically and pedagogically. For example, his views on politics of identity, culture, national liberation and resistance, the ‘dialectic of experience’, offer lessons for the contemporary African learner in extending our explorations of the ‘colonial encounter’ and the ‘colonizing experience’ into a cohesive theoretical and practical contribution to social and educational thought and political action. Fanon reminds us of the power of the revolutionary consciousness and that the plight of the African intellectual in his colonial mimicry is itself an obstacle to our thinking outside the dominant box of knowledge. We need a revolutionary consciousness to understand and deal with the role of schools in both producing and resisting the creation of a ‘pathological personality’. There is a Black/African ontology, a science and an essence of being, a personality [if you will] that exists and must exist outside the construction of the ‘African’ within Euro-American hegemony, ideology, imagination and thought. A cultural decolonization is critical to address cultural colonization – i.e., through developing critical consciousness, a radical and mobilizing new awareness to knowledge and knowledge production.

Resistance to dominant and colonizing knowledges in order to transform our educational institutions should be an end goal of intellectual and political exercises. This will mean declaring the falsity of the independence of scholarship and activism divide. As African scholars and

educators we should challenge ourselves by asking: "How are we complicit in Western hegemony?" "How does the search for knowledge create an ethical responsibility to share relevant knowledge with our communities?" "As producers of knowledge, how does our work contribute to the oppression or liberation of our people?" Change does not lie outside our purview. The power of individual and collective agency lies in the ontological primacy of interpretations – how we define and make sense of our worlds. The 'ontology of the [black] body' rests on recognition of race and racial identity as embodied knowing. We must use knowledge and practice to resist the violence of the 'inferiority complex' syndrome, which wounds us to our very core. The violence that Fanon diagnosed was violence intended to "heal the spiritually wounded" and was a cleansing measure.

Fanon's ideas are helpful in pointing to the intellectualizing of transformative political projects, as well as the revolutionizing of intellectuality. We must resist colonizing knowledge if 'fulfilling education' is ever going to be a reality. Our education must make a difference and create space for our learners to work with[in] communities. The affirmation of the anti-colonial intellectuality is to address the major problems that oppressed and marginalized learners have to deal with: a) negation of historical experiences and collective and cultural memories; b) negation of our subjectivities; c) the denial of the embodiment of knowledge; d) the persistent and continuing struggles against our dehumanization; e) the 'spirit injury' of perpetual resistance; f) the often times easy and seductive slippage into the form, logic and implicit assumptions of the very things we are contesting, as well as g) the lack of mental/bodily/spiritual nourishment and accommodation (including food, shelter, clothing, and so on) that often accompany the systemic oppressions many of our people experience.

Broader implications for producing African Indigenous knowledge as 'heritage knowledge'

I now advance an Indigenous and anti-colonial framework for the study of Black/African education in the Diasporic context. Claiming 'Indigenous' is about a perspective anchored in Indigenous knowledge and local cultural knowing. The Indigenist perspective makes a distinction between 'Indigenous' and 'local/traditional' knowledge. 'Indigenous knowledge' is knowledge of the Indigenous peoples of a particular land used for everyday living, self and collective actualization, survival and social existence. Local knowledge, on the other hand, can be possessed by any group (not necessarily Indigenous to the land) who have lived in a particular place/location or space for a period of time and come to know by experiencing that social environment through time (see Fals Borda, 1980, 1991; Roberts, et. al., 2004; Purcell, 1998).

Both Indigenous and traditional/local knowledge work with the nexus of society-culture-interface, as well as the interrelations of the body, mind and soul. They avoid a Cartesian split of body and mind and acknowledge the power of ancestralism and ancestral knowings. Indigenous knowledge affirms spirituality as a site of knowing and further argues that knowledge and resistance go hand in hand. For African peoples such knowing is a form of 'heritage knowledge'

(King, 2005). This heritage knowledge is characterized by a philosophy of ‘worldsense’, i.e., systems of thought and ontologies speaking to the realities and workings of the cosmos, and the nexus of nature, society and culture. The uncertainty of knowing is appreciated along with the power of ‘not knowing’. In effect within Indigenous knowledge ‘the fear of not knowing’ is acceptable and inconsequential (see Dei, 2011, 2012b). The idea of Indigeneity speaks to the ways of knowing as a body of epistemology connecting place, spirit and body (see also Meyer, 2008). The spiritual is embodied and learners’ spiritual identities are engaged in education. Spiritual identity is connected to the Land/Mother Earth and to one’s inner self/soul and their physical and social surroundings. Spirituality is a way of knowing (Dillard, 2000; Dillard, Abdur-Rashid & Tyson, 2000) including emotions. Indigenous cultural knowledge is about searching for wholeness and completeness.

The anti-colonial discursive framework (borrowing from the pioneering works of Fanon, 1963, 1967; Memmi, 1965; Cesaire, 1972; wa Thiong’o, 1986) involves a theorization of colonial and re-colonial relations and the aftermath and the implications of power and imperial structures on: a) the processes of knowledge production, interrogation, validation and dissemination; b) claims of Indigeneity and Indigenous knowings; and, c) the recourse to agency, subjective politics and resistance. “Colonial” is defined as more than simply anything ‘foreign’ or ‘alien’. Rather ‘colonial’ must implicate anything that is “imposed” and “dominating” (see Dei, 2000; Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001; Dei and Kempf, 2006). The concern of the anti-colonial is also with re-organized ‘colonial’ relations rather than a supposedly ‘new colonial’ and, particularly, the ways re-organized colonial relations and mindsets structure and dominate social relations of knowledge production, ruling and social practice. Such analysis allows for the interrogation of power relations structured along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, language, disability and sexuality.

Anti-colonial theorising should seek transformation, not merely understanding of complexities, messiness, disjunctures, contentions, and contradictions of social realities. The anti-colonial perspective argues that mutual ‘co-existence’ cannot simply be assumed to exist; it must be fought for and realized. Thus an anti-colonial pursuit is to subvert and decentre power and not necessarily to share or contest power. In this subversion, there is a central place for local cultural knowings, as well as local [subject] voices in the dialogue on Black/African education. Teasing out points of contention, resistance and opposition in these voices offer possibilities for transforming current social systems. An anti-colonial approach to understanding the challenges of Black and African education allows us to learn from the intellectual agency of African peoples in providing education for their children. It affirms our agencies and voices in designing educational futures for our children. The anti-colonial is also about asking new and different questions. Current formal schooling is a colonial and oppressive system and transforming the educational system calls for an anti-colonial questioning stance. How do we subvert the ways the education of peoples of African descent has denied heterogeneity in local populations through the project of ‘sameness’? How do educators provide anti-colonial education in ways that allow learners to develop a strong sense of identity, self and collective respect, agency and

empowerment to participate in community building? How do learners and educators work to create schools as healthy, working communities? What is the role of local knowledge in subverting the internalized colonial hierarchies of conventional schooling by promoting Indigenous teachings that focus specifically on social values, community and character education? How do we revise schooling and education to espouse, at its centre, such values (and the subsequent struggle for them) as social justice, equity, fairness, resistance and collective responsibilities?

When fusing together an Indigenous anti-colonial framework, we can examine how local African voices shift beyond mere critiques of the current educational order to transformative options that genuinely educate all learners. There is also the importance of upholding the idea of experiential, embodied knowings. Claiming Indigeneity necessarily entails an anti-racist, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist stance. Indigeneity and anti-coloniality are about resistance, subject[ive] agency and collective politics. They each centre the agency and the authenticity of voice and political and intellectual interests of Indigenous, local and oppressed subjects in accounting and resisting oppression and domination. What the politics of Indigeneity and anti-coloniality teach is that to learn is to act. Knowledge must compel action. Thus, there must be recognition of the interdependence of 'scholarship', 'politics' and 'activism'. It is not about prescribing a particular political ideology. Rather, it is about creating a space to legitimize politics in the intellectual/academic realm.

The Indigenous anti-colonial framework is about using an Indigenous lens to trouble Western science hegemony, specifically in the Western intellectual tradition. The Indigenous anti-colonial framework is anchored in the theoretical supposition that there are multiple knowledge forms with respective ways of knowing. European and Western scientific tradition is just one aspect of science knowledge. In other words, as Okeke (2005) long ago noted, the West is one of the many producers of science (quoted in Lebakeng, 2010, p. 27). The Indigenous anti-colonial framework is about resistance and contestation of ideas. I see a particular responsibility for Indigenous scholars and our institutions of higher learning in the promotion of Indigenous knowledge.

Throughout the Western academy the dominance of the Western intellectual tradition is clear. I do not hear many accusations of inappropriate or essentialist intellectual engagement when Western science is paraded as the only valid knowledge. Contrast this with the charge of 'essentialism' when those of us who engage in counter-hegemonic intellectual work through claims of Indigenous knowledges, Indigeneity and authenticity of self, voice, culture history and identity as part of the multiple ways of knowing! When we hear calls for the validation of our Indigenous truth claims, it is important to ask: Through what lens and perspectives are we being asked to engage in these validation processes? Who has power to determine validity? And, as discussed above, how do we develop the power to determine for ourselves the validity of our truth claims, without hegemonic impositions? In fact, we must see some of the reactions to Indigenous knowledges in the Western academy as more a question of how such knowledge

reacts with certain bodies (in terms of threatened identities and politics), more so than where such knowledge sits (in terms of whether it is robust, sophisticated or shows theoretical clarity).

The African-centred paradigm is an important theoretical and pragmatic space for African peoples to interpret and critically reflect upon their own experiences on their own terms and through the lenses of their worldviews and understandings, rather than being forced to understand the world through a Eurocentric lens. African-centred perspectives become an African worldview. As Molefi Asante and many others have argued, the African-centred perspective is about developing an African worldview. This worldview, as a system of thought, is shaped by the lens of Africology and stresses the centrality of culture, agency, history, identity and experience. Consequently, African-centred education stresses notions of culture, centring learners' histories, identities and experiences, and focusing on the learner's agency to bring about change in their personal and community lives. We need to work with the notion of the 'centredness' of the learner in her or his learning in order to engage knowledge. A culturally grounded perspective that centres African/Indigenous peoples' worldviews helps resist the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives. There is the need to centre the agency of marginalized and colonized peoples such that African learners, and all learners, become subjects of their own histories and stories and experiences (see Asante 1991, 2003; Mazama, 2001; van Dyk, 1996; Ziegler, 1996).

Conclusion

A re-visioning of Black/African education must have a place for local cultural knowledge. Local cultural resource knowledges of African peoples are sometimes least analysed for their contributions to schooling, education and development. The teachings of local cultural knowledges about community, social responsibility, mutual interdependence, and solidarity usually conflict with the neo-liberal economic values of competitive individualism, consumerism, efficiency, productivity, etc. Building on what African learners know, school teachings can be affirming in helping to develop the agency, voice and power of learners to own their education. Working with cultural knowledge as a form of African cultural inheritance, a fund of knowledge through a process of anti-colonial knowledge construction (e.g. using the instrumentality of African Indigenous languages) education can ensure the complete development of the learner to be aware of their social responsibilities and to combine academic success with social success.

An Indigenous education is characterized by knowledge production, interrogation, validation and dissemination [including teaching and learning] which utilizes what was available, what people know and sought to know, how African learners come to understand and interpret their worlds (social, physical and metaphysical) and acted within such worlds for effective social existence. Such education is a teaching and learning about the past, present and future continuum that emphasizes the place of local culture, traditions and history. It makes the individual subject a whole being, belonging to a community and with societal responsibilities. Education is defined

as more than going to school. It is learning about family, community, nature and society interconnections through everyday practice and social activity. The educational site is not just the 'school' but within and throughout communities, homes and families. An educated person is one who understands herself/himself as a whole person - mentally, spiritually, culturally, emotionally, physically and materially -- and as continually guided by the mutual obligations to, and interdependence with, the wider community. We need an Indigenous anti-colonial education to challenge the compartmentalization of education into separate social, cultural, spiritual, political, biological dimensions. We need to challenge the split between the social and natural sciences and narrow conceptualizations of what counts as science, intellectuality, and critical inquiry. We need to do whatever it takes to build liberatory ways of educating our young people and ourselves. This means that, as we resist - from the inside or the outside - the current education system that oppresses us, we must be building better alternatives for the mental/physical/spiritual health, safety and wellbeing of all learners.

Notes

1. Over the years a central research concern and preoccupation has been how to promote minority youth education in Canada through exemplary practices of inclusive schooling. I see the current project as part of the search for viable educational alternatives for youth. Working with OISE/UT graduate students, my past and on-going research has identified some of the problems of minority youth disengagement from school, as well as educational innovations that can successfully promote effective learning for youth and enhance their educational outcomes (see Dei, et al., 1995, 1997, 2000, 2002). Through these studies, it has been possible to learn about the challenges and possibilities of inclusive schooling. Inclusive schooling involves recognition of the important role of Indigenous/local cultural resource based knowledge base for the contemporary learner. All learners come to school with particular and shared histories, cultures, identities, experiences and knowledge bases. Their communities constitute rich sources of knowledge and schools must find ways to work with these cultural knowings. In 2009 I completed a three-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded study examining the life histories and personal accounts of 'high academic achievers' in high schools, colleges and universities. The study offers poignant insights into the power and efficacy of students' school and off-school/community knowledges, cultural histories, and experiences and how learners link their myriad identities to knowledge production. Informed by past and on-going research, my teaching and scholarly writings have always viewed local knowledges as part of the multiple knowings that exist within communities and as containing possibilities for enhanced learning for diverse learners (Dei, et al., 2010). In my current, on-going research on African Indigenous philosophies, I am exploring Indigenous knowledge systems in Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya. This SSHRC-funded study has four (4) objectives: i) to document and explore the particular teachings are emphasized in local cultural resource knowledge base through local proverbs, songs, fables, folktales, myths, and mythologies; ii) to critically examine

the specific instructional, pedagogic, and communicative values and challenges contained in these teachings; iii) to understand the ways these bodies of knowledge can be engaged to enhance learning for a diverse group of students using Indigenous/ local cultural resource knowledge as sites of multiple knowings; and, iv) to tease out the extent to which such local cultural knowledges deal with social difference and the implications for promoting inclusive learning in pluralistic contexts.

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