

Transformative Multilingual Education ‘Spaces’ and Democratic Citizenship

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KEYWORDS Democracy. World Citizenship. Multilingualism. Capability Approach. Critical Pedagogy

ABSTRACT A focus on a mono-lingual education for a world citizenry, instead of multilingual education that broadens ‘transformative learning spaces’ spells uncertainty for the human race. Such a narrow focus on the use of languages is perilous to endeavours of nurturing democracy and world citizenship. Drawing on Tagorean human capabilities, the paper proposes a three-fold model for transforming the capabilities of learners through multilingual education worthy of cultivating a pluralistic world citizenry that can multi-respond to the diverse world problems and issues. The proposition advanced also cautions on the excessive emphasis on the sciences and technology disciplines in the process down-playing languages, as part of the arts and the humanities in their advancement of both a local and a global citizenship.

THE PRECARIOUS NATURE OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

All over the world, where democracy is entrenched or is just taking root, it is imperative that democracy is not taken for granted. Any democratic rule is like a living organism, that must be provided with nourishment or it must fend for itself — assuming there is land, water and nourishment provision. What this means is that those charged with the responsibility and accountability to lead and manage the services and goods of nations (society) must do so with all the humility they can amass. Service to civic is not an individualistic endeavour, but it is a collective one. This means that it becomes collective praxis (community of practice endeavour). Service is not just working with others, but it is knowing and understanding fully that service to people is about other people, it is not about oneself. This is a huge responsibility on all the people serving in public institutions, especially because our global world promotes individuality more than the act of serving others.

All forms of social equality (justice in trade, health, religion, food security, environmental responsibility and multilingualism) cannot be accomplished if not nurtured by those charged with the responsibility and accountability to ensure that societies are fairly treated and services and goods due to all are made available and accessible to all. This means that all social equalities must be entrenched and injustices of all forms be eradicated and equitable provision

and distribution of services and goods be open to all. One stumbling block, however, in achieving this goal could be the hegemony of language usage in any society. One language might be legitimated to the expense of other languages present. Such a stance might compromise the knowledge to be accessed regarding all the well-intended programmes or policies made to nurture and encourage the growth of democracy in a pluralistic society. Therefore, transformative multilingual education must ground its curricula to provide students with opportunities to critically empower themselves to challenge and change the status quo. The good of all people, both locally and internationally, is critical in human development for world citizenry (Gough 2007; Klein 2006; Barrietos 1996; Cenoz 2009).

Democracy is not necessarily a blueprint grand design for humanity devoid of praxis. The foundations of democracy are grounded in a citizenry whose purpose and resolve are driven by a deliberate effort to make democracy ‘live’ for human development. This view is supported by Campbell (2000: 12-13), who contends that “schools whether public or private, may reinforce anti-democratic values and increase the hostile divisions in our society, or teachers can reconstruct schools to become laboratories for democratic life”, and that “we need to live together, to at least tolerate one another, or we may yet tear our society apart”. Campbell’s position also reiterates Dahl’s (1985) position that advocates a democracy that glues people together rather than tear them apart. This is highlighted

by his criteria for democracy, namely that democracy promotes equal voting, effective participation of citizens, enlightened understanding, a final control of the agenda by people, and inclusiveness. These criteria by Dahl (1985) are emphasised by Campbell's (2000: 28) statement that "a democratic society encourages maximum citizen participation in political decision-making, respects the rule of the majority, and protects the rights of minorities." It is, therefore, not surprising that fundamental constitutional values, locally and internationally, include human rights. The researcher's argument in this article is for a more focused school curriculum that articulates multilingualism as espoused in inclusivity, equal human rights and justice equity, and stewardship to humanity.

For that reason, local and international policy imperatives pertaining to issues of sustainable lifestyles and sustainable resources utilisation need to be grounded in perspectives encouraging and enhancing the 'good of all'. As an individual, my well-being depends on the well-ness of others just as the wellness of others depends on me. The dialectical cohesion of this view is stronger than a monolithic perspective of self. Hence, we see numerous examples, the world over of ethnic tribes trying to wipe out other tribes because of the belief that they can be better off alone than living with others in their 'space' (conflicts in East Africa and other parts of the world). Human dignity, language choice and life is a human right enshrined in all democracies of the world, and these must be respected.

Although the use of language provides humanity with enormous spaces for useful individual and collective cultural capital development worthy of furthering democracy and citizenship, the researcher cautions that language(s) that different people speak can also entrench and legitimise power relations that divide people along ethnic, cultural, and religious lines. The application of the Tagorean human capabilities approach to an emancipatory education in this article is to broaden education curricula to develop human capabilities that promote diversity in local and global contexts through conceptualisation application. Vollebaeck (February 12, 2008) agrees with the notion of applying concepts in a process that seeks to further learning.

The article starts with an introduction that spells out the issues to be discussed. The re-

searcher then discusses the theoretical thinking and critical pedagogy thinking as underscored by transformative and multilingual education. Next, the researcher discusses the Tagorean human capabilities as foundational to democratic living and citizenship education. The research continues by proposing the application of the Tagorean capabilities approach to education in order to develop pluralistic views of democracy and citizenship education. The researcher concludes the conceptual article with a brief summary of the main ideas discussed in the article.

MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE CURRICULA

Since transformative learning spaces are usually understood in different ways, one way could be to see them as learning contexts of many and differently structured formations. These could be formal, non-formal and informal. Of note is that they cannot be haphazardly applied. They must be deliberate and purposeful, because their goal is to ensure that during the learning process, reflexivity and reflection on the subject or act of learning, brings about new or redefined constructed knowing that will enable new ways of acting upon what has been learnt.

Because the world has become a much contracted space regarding its past observed vastness, multilingual education has become more critical for the survival of all of us globally. In order to not only be able to communicate with others on the other side of the globe, we need to know their languages and basic tenets of their cultural capital. We need to establish what binds humanity irrespective of where people are, what their colour is, what their religions are. Of note, it is when educators and all involved in teaching (formal, in-formal or non-formal), make it their business to know about the other person/s, when the next person will be more open and be willing to work with, that we as a people are better prepared to make a meaningful education contribution to humanity. Meaningful education endeavours in this regard cannot be compromised in teaching children these realities at a younger and tender age. Nussbaum (2006: 387) supports, "...young citizens form, at a crucial age, habits of mind that will be with them all through their lives". These crucial habits are better developed through transformative multi-

lingual education. Skutnabb-Kangas (2004: 173) concurs with the view that children become literate more quickly and easily. It is not so much a problem for children to learn a language that will enable them to access the cultural capital of other people.

However, Skutnabb-Kangas (2004: 169) cautions that subtractive teaching (children taught through the medium of a dominant language, which replaces their mother tongue) prevents profound literacy. It prevents children (students) from gaining the knowledge and skills that correspond to their innate capacities that is needed for socio-economic mobility and democratic participation. The document *Educating for Sustainable Development*, (2004: 13-14) indicates that,

Education helps to transmit cultural values, behaviour and identities. The role of mother languages in the transmission of knowledge and in the quality of learning is very important. This is especially so for indigenous peoples and for preserving the richness of indigenous knowledge and traditional environmental practices. ...as well as safeguarding cultural traditions, education must also help prepare people to meet present-day challenges, and future ones, with hope and confidence.

In instances where English is used as a subtractive teaching medium, it does more harm to learners than the good of the learners in becoming excellent in speaking it. Skutnabb-Kangas (2004: 174) warns that English is not enough. It produces snobs who are mentally colonized and culturally and mother tongue alienated people. The world certainly does not need such citizenry. The researcher concurs with Cummins (2000: 246) that, when educators encourage culturally diverse students to develop the language and culture they bring from home and build on their prior experiences, they, "together with their students, challenge the perception in the broader society that these attributes are inferior or worthless". Critical pedagogy is, therefore, crucial in education.

It is necessary to further explain this point of grounding education in critical pedagogy. According to Popkewitz and Fendler (1999: 50), critical pedagogy represents reactions of progressive educators against everything that is false or discriminatory on the grounds of race, class or gender. These scholars further argue that critical pedagogy enables educators and learn-

ers to work within educational institutions and other media (curricula) to raise questions about inequalities of power, about false myths of opportunity and merit, and about the way belief systems become internalized to the point where individuals and groups abandon aspirations to question or challenge their lot in life. Torres-Guzman and Gomez (2009: 6) concur with Popkewitz and Fendler. They contend that from a critical theoretical outlook, the fate of languages in contact, meaning languages that ascend language of instruction in the classroom, both locally and internationally, in the process marginalising the home language of the learners, is associated with broader issues of power relationships. They further mention that a fundamental principle in multi-language education is appropriate and effective teaching that builds on what children already know and can do (Torres-Guzman and Gomez 2009: 21). The researcher sees this thought as reiterating the importance of children's cognitive development and oral language development as extended in various ways, including moving them toward insights and understandings about cultural and diversity issues that strengthen a plural world citizenship.

The researcher concurs with Torres-Guzman and Gomez that critical pedagogy, defined as interactions between educators and students that attempt to foster collaborative relations of power in the classroom, suggests an orientation to pedagogy that is transformative because its intention is to challenge the operations of coercive relations of power in the school and wider society. It focuses not on the student as learner with the implied assumption that the teaching/learning process is neutral with respect to social realities and intergroup power relations (Cummins 2000: 253). It recognizes that the process of identity negotiation is fundamental to educational success for all students, and furthermore that this process is directly determined by the micro-interactions between individual education systems and students.

Critical curriculums seem to be open to multi-perspectives of knowledge production and provides for varied ways of knowing and understanding. This view also allows critical pedagogy to be grounded in situated learning. Commenting about varied ways of knowing and understanding in a pluralistic global world, McLaren (1989 in Campbell 2000: vii) indicates

that critical pedagogy situates itself in the intersection of language, culture and history, which are the nexus in which students' subjectivities are formed, contested and played out. It is for that reason that the researcher argues that a transformative multilingual education (transformative curricula) in all institutions of learning irrespective of how they are structured whether structured formally, informally or commercially, as long as they develop capabilities that enable humanity not just to coexist, but to motivate, teach and promote each other to be better beings.

TAGOREAN CAPABILITIES UNDERPINNING AN OPEN MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION PROCESS

Different perspectives on what can be viewed as capabilities or capability approach abound in human development scholarship. Scholars like Sen (2005) and Nussbaum (1997) who are perhaps seen as the pioneers of the human development capability thought, are no longer privileged in this discourse. Of these scholars who have also come into the fold of thinking about human capabilities, is Tagore (Cited in Qizilbash 2006), an Indian renowned scholar who proposes that human capabilities should include: the ability to think critically, peoples' ability to see themselves as not simply citizens of some local region or group, but also, and above all as human beings tied to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern, and the ability to think what it would be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself (Nussbaum in Qizilbash 2006: 295). These Tagorean human capabilities are critically assessed and synthesised for what they mean for education that seeks to cultivate humanity.

The ability to think critically cannot be understood on its own, as a complete act or an outcome (end-product). It must be understood in the context of making an informed decision about an individual (collectively too) to act responsibly when serving society. Thinking critically therefore, embodies the notion of individually reflecting on ones actions, and also reflecting on actions of collectives. Observing how this human capability could be developed, Tabulawa (2008) sees schooling as a better process to produce a programme-able learner who is also a

critical thinker. Although the researcher does not share Tabulawa's concept of a programme-able learner (referring to as a learner who is schooled in doing exactly as taught), the researcher agrees that Tabulawa highlights the necessity of learners who can always critically re-evaluate their contexts and redefine, adapt and take appropriate action. Tagore adds that education should be able to teach learners to be critical of their own assumptions about reality, in being able to critique stereotypes about the "other".

The people's ability to see themselves as not simply citizens of some local region or group but also, and above all as human beings tied to all other beings by ties of recognition and concern, is better clarified in the words of His Excellency Knut Vollebaeck, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to Europe (February 12, 2008), explains that "the long-term sustainability of all conflict prevention measures is contingent upon the establishment of democratic and pluralistic societies for all persons, including those belonging to national minorities (that they) have a say and a stake in public life". In other words, this "requires citizens that are able to respect and work together with others that may be different from themselves because of the language they fondly speak. Respect for different spoken languages is vital for democracy and for humanity in general. Kadar Asmal (in Fien 2004: 26), then Minister of Education (1999-2004), serving under Thabo Mbeki, then President of the Republic of South Africa (1999-2009), languages are vital for the individual and collective agency for developing both a local and global citizenry in a democratic setting. He states that

We have the solutions within our grasp. We must invoke our collective wisdom, our collective humanism. We will have to travel the depths of our knowledge to forge the solutions that must be purposefully and urgently applied to save our global village. We need to face up to this defining moment with fortitude. We need to take concrete actions, uphold our commitments and forge a collective human agency through constructive and credible partnerships, different cultures and histories.

Attesting to this observation Nussbaum (1997: 68) says: "world citizens will legitimately devote more attention and time to their own region and its history, since it is above all in that

sphere that they must operate". She further reiterates that, the need for local knowledge has important educational consequences. She cautions that: "we would be absurdly misguided if we aimed at giving our students an equal knowledge of all histories and cultures, just as we would be if we attempted to provide a bit of knowledge of all languages". Of note is that a balance between local citizenship and global citizenship in a democratic dispensation is vital. Students need to be taught in their local cultures and histories. But they must also be taught in global cultures and histories. If not exposed to knowledge's of both local and world views, they will be found wanting when challenged by complex circumstances that need them to act in a certain appropriate way.

The ability to think what it would be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself is embedded in the notion of perceiving diversity as a noble strength and building block for individual and collective agency to transform and diffuse stereotypes regarding the 'other'. It is only when one starts thinking in a deeper way on how the other person feels under the circumstances they are in, that one is called to empathise. Nussbaum seems to think that: "humanity must consider itself as citizens of the world, and that society must become to a certain extent, philosophical exiles from its own ways of life, seeing itself from the vantage point of the outsider and asking the questions an outsider would likely ask about its "meaning and function" (Nussbaum 1997: 57-58). Reiterating the necessity for education to foster the ability to be in the shoes of another person different than oneself, Songca (2006: 230) emphasises that education ought to enable students to have abilities to first understand before they can seek to be understood. He further says that "seeking first to understand is an entirely different paradigm. It requires a person to listen with empathy. Empathetic listening enables us (humans) to get inside another person's frame of reference. It enables a person to see life through the eyes of another, to understand a person's paradigm and how they feel (Covey 2004, in Songca 2006: 230). The two arguments stress the need for multilingual education as transformative reality (knowledge) that changes how people perceive "other" people different from themselves. This is not an easy and straight forward

educational task. Gosh and Giroux (2004: 22) indicates that truth (reality) is based on different ways of knowing that are complex and contradictory as a result of differences in human experiences.

In the Tagorean human capability framework, it postulates complexities of human life as perceived from different vantage points. It depicts uncertainty of world events that demand multiple ways of knowing. It perceives varied interconnections of knowledge; and it deliberately acknowledges the world as classroom for knowledge creation. Thus education is crucial for citizens in a democracy.

The researcher concludes this section that quality education and human capabilities are pillars of a transformative multilingual education geared for democracy. Coupled with this view is the idea that knowledge creation is purposed to lead one towards freedom, and that, that can only happen when knowledge increases awareness of the hidden aspects of power relations within education and society in general. That is, when it deliberately diffuses and accords emancipatory knowledge to all people irrespective of the social status (Gosh and Giroux 2004: 22; Glasser 2007: 41). Since knowledge creation is defined by socio-cultural and historical forces (Gosh and Giroux 2004: 23), it is prudent to emphasise that the ability to think critically, people's ability to see themselves as not simply citizens of some local region or group but also, and above all as human beings tied to all other beings by ties of recognition and concern, and the ability to think what it would be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, should form the focus of school curricula as social activities.

MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION FOR CULTIVATING A PLURAL WORLD CITIZENRY

In this article the researcher proposes a three-fold model of human capabilities, as designed by Tagore, to transform curricular. The goal is that education should cultivate capabilities in students to be local and world citizens. Students must learn through school curricular that they are not just learning to better themselves, but must learn also that they must better the lives of others because they live in a pluralistic world. *The ability to think what it would be like to be*

in the shoes of a person different from oneself demands of them (and all of humanity) to empathise and continuously reflect on what one can do and how one can do a better service that improves the quality of and wellness of others.

In cultivating a better local or world environment for others, by learning to be both a local and world citizen as a prerequisite for a growing democracy, one need to learn that *people's ability to see themselves as not simply citizens of some local region or group but also, and above all as human beings tied to all other beings by ties of recognition and concern*, is critical and is demanded in the world that is plural and that need transformative multilingual education. However, it must not just be multilingual education for the sake of meeting policy imperatives, but must be a deeper type of multilingual learning, that encourages students to critique power relationships based on the hegemony imposed by language(s) in the different learning environments. A local and global citizenry that can multi-respond to the diverse world issues in a manner that shows "beings tied to other beings by ties of recognition (human race devoid of colour as entitlement to goods and services), and concern", as underpinned by the biblical statement that says love your neighbour as you love yourself. Such a concern for humanity is devoid of the self only, but perceives the problems of other people as ones' problems.

Multilingual curricula need to integrate deep thinking capabilities because it is underscored by *the ability to think critically*, it is for that reason that this proposition advanced in this article suggests a strong role of a humanities curriculum. The excessive emphasis on the sciences and technology disciplines in the expense of the humanities and the arts, that also have a pivotal role to play in the advancement of local and global citizenship is rendering both the sciences and technology, the humanities and arts poor because they are seen as disconnected knowledges, yet in the real world it is not so. The sciences, technology, humanities and arts can all provide students with the capability to think critically and to be able then to decide and take appropriate decisions in serving humanity. Thus, an educated world citizenry can have a better agency in pursuing their social, political, economic and environmental goals. Both individual and collective agencies are critical for democracy that is based on the services of its people.

CONCLUSION

It has become apparent that all nations of the world cannot ignore any social ills ravaging any part of the world as not theirs, just because the social ills are ravaging people who speak a different language than theirs. What happens in one part of the world, impacts on the other parts of the world. For that reason, transformative multilingual education is imperative in nations that want to strengthen their democracies and be global citizens. School curricula need to be guided by the human rights, justice, equality, non racism and tenets of pluralists' nations. Most importantly, deliberate efforts to plan and design curricula furthering critical pedagogy for schooling, must be integrated with the broader mission of education, both locally and internationally. For present and future growth of multilingual world citizenry, transformative multilingual education is the key.

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