

[Re]Anglicizing the Kids:  
Contradictions of Classroom Discourse  
in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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It is summer of 2000; I am sitting in the living room in our small four-roomed township house with my nephew, Thuto. It was not uncommon for Thuto and I to hang out and chitchat about many things whenever I was at home. Thuto was born in 1991, after I had already left home for college, and the only time I got to see or play with him was during my summer or winter vacations at home. On this particular day, Thuto and I were engaged in our routine storytelling, joking, teasing, and so forth. Around lunchtime, when we had just gotten back from buying bread for our lunch munchies, Thuto quickly realized that the mailperson had delivered some envelopes to our mailbox. Among the bunch of mail received, mostly my sister's bills and banking statements, there was an envelope for me with a U.S. stamp on it. I quickly opened up the envelope. It was a card from my friend Steve, who had written a short but pleasant message.

At this point Thuto was curious and anxious to hear what the card had to say. However, instead of telling him, I decided to hand over the card for him to read out loud for me. Interestingly enough, the message on the card had two portions written in two different languages—English and IsiZulu. He read the English portion quite fluently and then made a sudden stop. I was puzzled by this sudden stop, but when I asked why he would not continue to read the IsiZulu portion, he responded in a soft and lilting voice: "*Uncle, I do not know how to read IsiZulu because we do not learn this language at school.*" Ironically, he was conversing in IsiZulu,

the very language he cannot read and presumably cannot write either. At this point I turned to my sister who was in the kitchen to verify if Thuto was telling the truth. As if my question did not startle her, she answered: "*Oh yeah, Thuto's school does not teach IsiZulu until kids reach sixth grade level.*" For a moment, I thought her response was just a joke, but soon realized it was not. To this end, I could not reconcile with the fact that some desegregated public schools do not offer IsiZulu as a language that ought to be taught early in schools—taking into account that IsiZulu is one of the indigenous languages widely spoken in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> How could this be true?

I may have told the story of my nephew Thuto, but this chapter is not only about him. It is also about the broader sociopolitical conditions in South African public schools. I move from the premise that if the South African school system is supposed to build a democratic nation, then it must reflect the democratic objectives of the nation. In the last five years, the new curriculum—Curriculum 2005—modeled on outcomes-based education (hereafter referred to as OBE) was implemented to "replace" apartheid education.<sup>2</sup> Thus far, the new curriculum has encountered significant limitations in terms of improving the educational deficit incurred by Africans previously from apartheid education in South Africa. Indeed, Jansen's (1999) claim that OBE does not have a single positive historical legacy was correct. However, let me hasten to state that while it is important to understand the problems surrounding OBE in South African public schools, the purpose of this chapter is not to examine OBE.<sup>3</sup> Rather, this chapter examines the intricacies, contradictions, and (im)possibilities in South African education in the wake of the increasing desegregation of public schools and in the implementation of new school reform policy. I seek to problematize the unrepresentative classroom curriculum that has led to the (re)colonization of the "Other." I particularly want to examine the (re)colonizing tendencies visible in many classrooms similar to Thuto's—tendencies, which are largely influenced by the dominant social discourse. I argue that interrupting these dominant tendencies can provide possibilities for a decolonizing educational policy and practice.

In many nations, classroom curriculum is ideologically controlled. As Apple (1996) argues, curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge. Rather, what is deemed legitimate knowledge is determined by some groups' vision of knowledge. Recent studies (Seepe, 2001; Vally and Dalamba, 1999) on South African desegregated public schools show that crucial issues that consider the curriculum content and classroom practice relevant to the indigenous people of South Africa have been pushed aside and decentered. Instead, classroom practice, in particular, has been immersed in the acculturation of African students into the dominant White upper-class school discourse in the name of "standards," "account-

ability," and "meritocracy." This practice of acculturation is mostly noticeable in desegregated public schools in the suburbs. As too often seen in other contexts, this is a neoliberal and neoconservative agenda at work, which merely perpetuates social inequalities (Apple, 2001).

This chapter has three purposes. First, it presents a brief historical background of education in South Africa under apartheid by explaining policy, curriculum, and practice in the Bantu education system. Second, the chapter addresses the curriculum and policy problems encountered in the post-apartheid school reform initiatives. As the vignette at the beginning shows, a significant example of this (re)colonization is the debacle of the language issue in desegregated public schools. All too many desegregated public schools are much too far from implementing a multicultural curriculum that represents the cultural experiences of all students. On the contrary, these schools are still imbued with curriculum prejudice, racism, and the marginalization of students of color. For example, most desegregated public schools have retained dominant and "acceptable" practices of behavior, appearance, and language. And these "acceptable" practices are the only dispositions considered "appropriate" in school. Third, drawing from postcolonial and other critical traditions, this chapter aims to interrupt the dominant ideologies, such as the Eurocentric perspectives of interpreting the world. Interrupting these ideologies also means condemning the colonial hegemony of exploitation that takes place not only in schools, but also in the broader society.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Bantu Education Act was passed in 1953 to enforce a separate education system for Africans in order to meet the development plans of apartheid in South Africa (Christie, 1985). Needless to say, this was a very inferior education system that was used to bring the majority of South Africans under the control of the apartheid state, which was committed to white supremacy. H. F. Verwoerd's parliamentary speech of 1953 was an official call for a total educational exclusion of black South Africans.<sup>4</sup> This policy also implied that African teachers and students were neither permitted to question nor criticize the state, the school curriculum, school policy, or any school authority. In many ways, as Mandela (1994) recounts, it was a way of institutionalizing inferiority.

Not only were these practices prevalent in public schools, they were also prevalent in higher education. Universities and teacher training colleges in particular were also separated by race. Although Black universities had academic autonomy to a certain degree, Black teacher training institutions were directly under the control of the state and their curriculum was

based on Bantu education.<sup>5</sup> In short, the curriculum policy functioned, to use Louis Althusser's (1971) term, as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) whereby the state ideology was transmitted through the explicit and hidden curriculum to advance the ideology of racial inequalities.<sup>6</sup> However, I must hasten to add that while it was the intention of the state to use education in the form of ISA, it soon became apparent that teachers and students were able to create a space for resistance. For instance, teachers and students were the ones who participated in the political struggles for liberation in the height of apartheid in the 1970s when most of our liberation movements were banned and many political activists were imprisoned.<sup>7</sup> Simply put, despite the adverse conditions, teachers and students had agency to decipher, predict, and resist the state hegemony.

#### REFORMS AND CONTRADICTIONS IN POST-APARTHEID EDUCATION

While many public schools have been desegregated, and school policy on curriculum has changed a great deal compared to the Bantu education era, there are no significant changes that reflect the diversity of the country. And while the new curriculum—Curriculum 2005—has been a “better” alternative compared to the Bantu education, it also has noticeable limitations in its policy and practice. For example, the emphasis on the new curriculum is mainly on procedures or pedagogy and outcomes more than it is on the content and form of the curriculum.

However, I do not mean to argue that pedagogy is less vital in the classroom, but I want to point out that engaging in curriculum reform requires asking questions about the nature of school knowledge and how that knowledge has been legitimized. As Apple (1996; 2001) reminds us, classroom curriculum is a political act that involves negotiations, contestation, and conflicts. Abundance of research (Apple, 1996; Bourdieu, 1985; Nieto, 2002; Seepe, 2001; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986) has shown that dominant groups have power and privilege to determine the kind of knowledge taught in schools. In a country that is riven by racial, gender, and social class inequalities, it is imperative that the school curriculum serve all students in an egalitarian way, regardless of their race, class, religion, gender, culture, or sexuality. Therefore, following on Apple's (1996) scholarship, we need to raise questions about what counts as school knowledge and who decides on what has to be taught in schools.

Again, the vignette in the beginning of this chapter articulates the conflict in the “official knowledge” and the unequal representation and how these pose a potential threat to equal educational opportunities, particularly in desegregated public schools. As the vignette reveals, **there is**

little or no multilingual/multicultural education in Thuto's classroom. The classroom discourse is by and large based on middle or upper-middle-class values. Perhaps it is germane to mention that in the South African context most people who speak English on a daily basis fall under the middle or upper-middle-class category and such people are deemed to hold “decent” or “civilized” social values, thus having a high social class status. By default, the “official knowledge” and values instituted through classrooms then tend to represent high-class status people who constitute the dominant group of the society. For example, the use of English only until sixth grade in some public schools, when actually the country's Constitution points that IsiZulu is one of the official languages, and when there is empirical evidence (Alexander, 1989) that IsiZulu is one of the widely spoken languages much more so than English, is a striking phenomenon. It, therefore, becomes apparent that despite the attempt to desegregate and democratize public schools, the dominant group's values remain the “official” school values. This tendency of entrenching dominant group values in public schools clearly puts on the periphery those students who are foreign to the dominant discourse and this leads to education inequalities.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1985) work provides a significant analysis of how culture relates to educational practice and outcomes. Bourdieu conducted a survey to determine how the cultural dispositions and cultural competence that are germane in the nature of cultural goods consumed, and the way they are consumed, vary according to the category of agents and the area to which they applied. One of Bourdieu's findings was the close relationship that links cultural practice and educational success. Given this particular finding, Bourdieu concluded that students from upper-class backgrounds bring to school their cultural capital, which puts them in advantage with school culture because both the school and their culture share more or less the same understanding, values, and artifacts.<sup>8</sup>

Obviously, when the school operates on White upper-middle-class values, without regard of students of color who come from the working-class background, there is a problem with the curriculum. My point here, however, is not to argue that students of color and those who have been marginalized should not have access to dominant knowledge. Dominant knowledge is vital for social mobility, especially for students who are on the margins. In this case, I am also mindful that parents of marginalized communities might choose to have their children emphasize English because of the material conditions in which they live.<sup>9</sup> However, social mobility becomes problematic if it is at the expense of some students' cultural experiences. I want to argue that the classroom discourse should also recognize even those students who are culturally and socially considered minorities by starting where these students are with their lived culture. That way the culture of the “Other” will not be pushed to the periphery.

Lisa Delpit (1995) helps us understand the importance of dominant school discourse for students who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. She argues that offering working-class students access to the language and the culture of power does not necessarily become a disservice to those students. Given the competitive and capitalistic nature of our society, and how educational success can lead students to "better" lives, students are judged, as Delpit (1995) puts it, by the "product" regardless of the process they utilized to achieve that product. However, Delpit (1995) does not necessarily advocate for a change of culture of those who are poor and Black to follow the dominant culture. She warns: "That may indeed, be a form of cultural genocide" (p. 30). The dilemma that we are faced with is an epistemological dilemma. Therefore, it becomes crucial that the classroom discourse represents all students' cultures not only to celebrate diversity, but also to acknowledge the worthiness of all students.

However, what is happening in Thuto's school is a total refusal to accommodate or at least acknowledge the knowledge and culture of the Other. If the culture of students like Thuto was embraced, not only introduced at sixth grade level, Thuto would be able to read and write IsiZulu language at an early stage. My radar screen shows a sharp warning—if classroom learning continues to elevate the already elevated upper middle-class Western values, the Indigenous languages and cultures will soon become endangered species.

#### ENDANGERED CULTURES

The situation in Thuto's classroom should be situated within the larger context of neocolonial tendencies of cultural imperialism. In an attempt to analyze this situation, I will use, among others, a postcolonial discourse as one of the lenses for critical analysis. According to John McLeod (2000), postcolonialism is not the equivalent of "after" colonialism. In other words, it does not suggest that values and practices that were inherent during the colonial era are now gone. Nor does a postcolonial lens define a radical new historical era, where the ills of the past have been cured. A postcolonial discourse, "In part involves the challenge to colonial ways of knowing, 'writing back' in oppositions to such views" (McLeod, 2000, p. 32). In this age of conservative modernization (Apple, 1996; 2001) it becomes important to interrupt hegemonic tendencies, including those that manifest themselves through educational institutions.

In his compelling analysis, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) laments a neocolonial situation that has opened up a door once more for European bourgeoisie to steal talents and geniuses from the cultures of the people they colonized and oppressed, just as they have stolen their economies.

This, he argues, has been done mostly through language. Language as a form of culture carries along cultural values and beliefs. On the relationship between language and culture, it is worth quoting Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) at length here:

Communication between human beings is also the basis and process of evolving culture. In doing similar kinds of actions over and over again under similar circumstances, similar even in the mutability, certain patterns, moves, rhythms, habits, attitudes, experiences, and knowledge emerge. . . . Over time, this becomes a way of life distinguishable from other ways of life. They develop a distinctive culture and history. Culture embodies those moral, ethical, and aesthetic values, a set of eyeglasses, through which they come to view themselves and place in the universe. Values are basis of people's identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this is carried by language. Language as culture is the collective memory bank of people's experience and history (p. 14).

Further, argues Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), colonial alienation takes two interlinked forms: an active or passive form that distances oneself from the reality around and an active or passive identification that is external to one's environment. Simply put, this is a deliberate effort of disassociation of the language of conceptualization, a language of daily interaction in one's home and in one's community. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) puts it: "On a larger social scale, it is like producing a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies" (p. 28).

Salim Vally and Yolisa Dalamba's (1999) disquieting report in a study by the South African Human Rights Commission shows similar colonial tendencies in the desegregated South African public schools. According to Vally & Dalamba (1999), the commission found that in almost all the cases where the survey was conducted, schools were engaged in "integrating while simultaneously assimilating black learners into dominant ethos of the school" (Vally and Dalamba, 1999, p. 14). Vally and Dalamba further report that the commission found that in former white schools (which are now integrated) there is a tradition of using a single language of learning and instruction. Given the commission's findings, Vally and Dalamba argue that schools were not moving proactively enough toward multilingualism and did not see language diversity as a school or classroom resource, but rather as a deficiency. Hence, claim Vally and Dalamba, in a number of schools the home languages of the majority of students are (unconstitutionally) banned. One of the students interviewed observed that "There is no freedom of speech and language—i.e., only English is to be spoken or else if you are heard speaking some other language, e.g., Venda,

you will be punished" [English and Afrikaans are the only languages that can be spoken]. (learner, school 701) (Vally and Dalamba, 1999, p. 43).

Not only is cultural imperialism prevalent in public schools, it is also prevalent in South African higher education as well. Given the current economic crisis, a phenomenon partly attributed to the increasing neoliberal influence, universities have begun to wrestle with the decline of resources in African languages, literature, humanities, and education.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in most universities there has been a decline in enrollment in those departments (Zwane, 2001). While it may be correct to argue that there has been a general decline of enrollment across university departments because of the lack of funding, the humanities and African languages departments suffer disproportionately because the limited resources go to technology, science, and engineering departments. In this age of conservative modernization, where markets, competition, and "standards" have superseded democracy, the latter departments are most likely to receive private donations from multinational corporations. Thus, Simon Zwane's (2001) commentary depicts the situation accurately:

The number of students studying African languages at universities has declined sharply in the past five years, giving rise to concerns about their future development in South Africa. Universities report that enrollment in African languages has been declining by half year since 1996. The Department of Education has described the decline as "an extreme worrying trend." . . . Kwena Mashamaite, Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of the North, blamed the decline on the government's emphasis that students should acquire skills in technology, science and engineering.

Traditionally, Black universities played a major role in conscientizing students about the racial politics of South Africa. Part of these conscientization efforts ought to be attributed, though not exclusively, to the apartheid atmosphere that existed in such departments as humanities, African languages, law, and education. Can we really afford to allow the emphasis on technology and markets to undercut those departments that contributed so immensely toward democracy in South Africa? Besides, these departments offer academic subjects that enhance critical thinking skills (educational philosophy) and cultural richness (African languages). I contend that while such areas as technology, natural sciences and engineering are important, their importance should not be at the expense of African languages, cultural studies, humanities, and education departments.

Prioritizing the former over the latter has two dangers. First, we assume that once we have achieved access to the former disciplines, social mobility and equal opportunity will automatically prevail. All too many people believe

that technology and market-gearred education will reward us all equally. Unfortunately this is not the case.<sup>11</sup> Market-oriented curriculum furthers the needs of marketized democracy that only rewards few individuals and marginalizes the "Other" (Apple, 2001; Lauder and Hughes, 1999). Second, we assume that the skills needed for social mobility do not include critical thinking and cultural politics. Delpit (1995) reminds us that while students need technical skills to open doors, they also need to be able to think critically and creatively in order to participate in meaningful and potential liberating work inside those doors. She asserts: "Let there be no doubt: a skilled minority person who is not also capable of critical analysis becomes the trainable, low-level functionary of the dominant society, simply the grease that keeps the institutions which orchestrate his or her oppression running smoothly" (Delpit, 1995, p. 19).

The language debacle in Thuto's classroom, the racial and cultural crisis in those schools visited by the South African Human Research Commission, and the worrying decline in African languages and humanities departments at Black universities are not the only concerns. Marginalization extends to other institutions, such as banking institutions, courts of law, and police departments. All too many of these institutions use English, a language foreign to many people in South Africa, particularly older people. Even with President Mbeki's persuasive African Renaissance philosophy, there remains insufficient effort to develop our resources while maintaining our language and culture.<sup>12</sup> I also want to put it into perspective here that my argument is not necessarily against the use of English in public schools and in other institutions, but rather I argue that English has been perceived, at least in the South African context, as the high-status language, and this is problematic and, more precisely, it is wrong. We need to ask who defines what is "low" or "high" status language, and what criterion is used to define it.

The dynamics of language instruction and practice is also related to the textbook content studied in schools. Given the Eurocentric education that existed in colonial and apartheid South Africa, the politics of textbooks becomes important to understand the racial, class, gender, religious, and cultural differences within different communities. In the next section, I turn to the politics of textbooks to examine how textbook content and structure is politically determined.

#### TEXTBOOKS AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

Language is not the only form of curriculum control. Textbook content is another form of curriculum control and it is indeed related to curriculum control since language is taught through textbooks. Apple's (1993)

analysis on the politics of textbooks helps us understand that the content of school textbooks is surrounded by controversies over what is included and excluded in texts:

Texts are really messages to and about the future. As part of curriculum, they participate in no less than the organized knowledge system of society. They participate in creating what society has recognized as legitimate and truthful. They help set the canons of truthfulness and, as such, also help recreate a major reference point for what knowledge, culture, belief, and morality really are. Yet such statement . . . is basically misleading in many important ways. For it is not a "society" that has created such texts, but specific groups of people. (Apple, 1993, p. 49)

Reflecting back to my own schooling experiences in the Bantu education system, I remember vividly the Eurocentric content of textbook knowledge—how that was used as curriculum control in school subjects. The history subject, especially the history of South Africa, was distorted, misrepresented, and some parts were omitted. Given the legacy of Bantu education, one would think that the textbook prejudice would be addressed immediately in the new curriculum. On the contrary, I found a different scenario when I visited Ematsheni High School in the fall of 2001.<sup>13</sup>

Oddly, I found that the history textbook has not changed much from what I had experienced as a student in the Bantu education system. To my surprise, though perhaps I shouldn't have been, the textbook looked outdated and in many ways resembled the Bantu education history textbook. The current textbook is divided into two sections—General and South African history. The first section, which is the general history, constitutes the "almighty" European/U.S. history—with focus including Lenin, Stalin, Roosevelt's New Deal, Monroe Doctrine, International Relations, Cold War, and so forth. Again, I do not mean to argue that such history is unimportant, but I think it would make more sense if, for example, the textbook would tell students how Lenin or Roosevelt might be related to South African politics or how they shaped the political world. I also want to help us think about the textbook structure when European/U.S. history gets allotted the first section in the textbook. This is suspicious for two reasons. First, it assumes that European/U.S. history is better than the local history. Second, it gives ample time for European/U.S. history to be taught to the end of the syllabus, while the South African section is rushed as the semester nears the end.

As I continued to peruse the general section, I realized a new theme called *Africa since World War II*. A question that promptly came to mind as I looked at this theme was, why would a textbook begin African history

at this particular period? This was approximately the period of decolonization of Africa. How would students know about the struggles of the colonized countries during the colonial era if colonialism itself was mentioned in a superficial way? As a compromise, the text mentions, superficially, movements for independence in Africa and the rise of nationalism as a way of introduction to the theme. This is nothing other than glossing over the theme as if it were less important. The simple fact that a textbook begins an important theme about Africa in the middle of that particular history is in itself a distortion of historical events, thus constraining efforts toward a truly representative curriculum.

Let me also add that whether or not the purpose of the theme was to talk about *Africa since World War II*, a representative history textbook needs to lay out a historical and political context on how African societies were shaped by colonial powers and colonialism (before and after World War II). Not to talk about or even allude to such events is tantamount to a total misrepresentation of African thought and philosophy. Also striking was the fact that while the textbook talks about the decolonization of Africa, there was no language of colonial critique. The textbook language gives a misleading impression that the decolonization of Africa was a free gift. There is very little mention of the struggle of men and women who put a gallant fight that exerted pressure against colonization. Further, the textbook talks about the common challenges facing the independent African states, yet does not mention the existing neocolonialism in those former colonized states. Should students be barred from learning about the effects of neocolonialism, which by the way has assumed a new form, namely, global economy, privatization, and markets? I want to argue here that unless history is taught critically students would find it hard to engage in historical events critically. Educators can do this by presenting textbooks with different historical perspectives, and by encouraging students to give different opinions as they support their claims.

The second section, the South African history, was even more striking. The first part covered the period 1924 to 1948. It concentrated on such topics as white political parties and white-only elections, economic policies, recognition of Afrikaners, great depression, Hertzog's racial policies, effects of the World War I on South African politics, labor unrest, and 1948 elections among other topics. With the African National Congress in existence as early as 1912, and with the active anti-apartheid mobilization of the Communist Party South Africa, and the Defiance Campaign of 1953 that exerted a lot of pressure against the racial policies of the National Party government, it was surprising that the political history of the latter was omitted.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps more alarming was how the period 1976 to 1994 was perceived and treated. This period appeared in the textbook as an "add-on."

Worse still, the instruction on the history syllabus read the following: "2.3 The period 1976 to 1994 (Not for examination purposes)," which meant students were not to be examined on this theme. Given the significance of this period in the history of South African politics, a period of worldwide campaign against apartheid, how could it be treated as an add-on? Once treated this way and not required for examination purposes, this implies that students will not be rigorously engaged in this particular history. Therefore, we can conclude that what is considered "serious" history, which students would be rigorously engaged in and examined on, was mainly based on the history of white political parties and the political struggles in the white-only elections of the now defunct apartheid state. Put simply, the textbook was divided into serious history and add-on history whereby the latter ignored and invalidated the ongoing struggle of the indigenous people to acquire and retain their sociopolitical and historical identity. Textbooks that are biased, that distort facts or omit crucial moments, reflect one of the tendencies of neocolonial tendencies that erase the collective memory of oppressed peoples. It needs also to be said that it is ironic when the events leading to 1994 democratic elections and beyond are treated as add-on history in South African classrooms, yet the national and international media is still imbued with these historical events. As I write this chapter, the local theater is showing a documentary on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa.<sup>15</sup>

Given the curriculum contradictions that exist in classrooms, we need to find mechanisms to help us change the curriculum so that all students, including those who have been on the margins, could benefit equally. Like the textbook problem that has recently caught the attention of the ministry, the language issue and the classroom discourse in general warrant similar attention. Educators, administrators, and researchers need to collaborate on and emphasize the importance of a decolonizing research as they create possibilities of a curriculum that tries to realize the dream of democracy in our public schools. Simply put, decolonizing research on education can help us address the curriculum bias and the general educational deficit incurred by students from marginalized communities, and this can create leverage for unfettered curriculum.

#### DECOLONIZING RESEARCH AS LANGUAGE OF POSSIBILITY

Decolonizing research in education can help us think about different perspectives in education policy that have the potential for educational equality. In fact, educational researchers have begun to look at curriculum and policy issues in a sophisticated way. Their work, progressive educators challenge any form of education that (re)produces racial, class, gender, and cul-

tural oppression of one group over the "Other." Sonia Nieto (2002), one of the advocates of decolonizing research, condemns a curriculum that assimilates students to the mainstream Eurocentric school culture. Rather, she proposes a curriculum that connects the issues of language, literacy, and culture in a substantive way. Nieto (2002) argues that it is a wrong assumption that students for whom English is a second language must master English before they can think and reason. As Nieto observes:

All children come to school as thinkers and learners, aptitudes usually recognized as important building blocks for further learning. But there seems to be a curious refusal on the part of many educators to accept as valid the *kinds* of knowledge and experiences with which some students come to school. For instance, speaking language other than English, especially those languages with low status, is often thought of by teachers as a potential detriment rather than a benefit to learning. (Nieto, 2002, p. 8)

These problematic assumptions on the part of educators do not stand alone. They are influenced and reinforced by the neocolonial tendencies of rendering the cultural identity and experiences of the Other invisible. Therefore, it becomes necessary for educators to realize the importance of decolonizing curriculum and teaching methods.

Similarly, Grant and Sleeter (1996) argued that one of the things that schools could do to accomplish democratic education is to develop learning and thinking processes that reward all students equally. One way of accomplishing this goal, they argue, is to take into account the intersectionality of race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability. They believe that when schools take into account this intersectionality, they begin to see these together and are able to address the problem of unequal education opportunities. Also as important, teachers should be able to examine themselves and should always ponder if their classroom practices are multicultural. Grant and Sleeter (1996) argue that it is not simply enough to be nice to students in face-to-face interaction, since one can be nice but still perceive others as inferior.

Decolonizing educational practice requires that teachers and students engage rigorously in classroom learning that critically examines real-life experiences, social institutions, race relations, and the political system. For a critical curriculum like this to be implemented, the content of the curriculum and classroom practice has to be democratically and collectively decided upon, not by individual groups who control political and economic power and/or by politically insensitive educators who consciously or unconsciously perpetuate racial, gender, and cultural stereotypes. The debate over what counts as "official knowledge" of the school and who decides it

is very important in classroom practice and curriculum reform. The better way to achieve this is to get parents, teachers, students, community activists, and administrators to deliberate on equal grounds, thereby ending the neocolonial hegemony that has persisted in our public schools.

Decolonizing discourse is also important for societal development and social equality. Siphso Seepe (2001) argues that societal development would never be achieved without placing African languages and culture at the heart of development. In one of his compelling arguments, Seepe (2001) states:

Significantly, the reliance on a second/foreign language as a medium of instruction is a unique heritage of colonialism. In countries that were not colonized, students use their mother tongue throughout their schooling and learning career. Studies indicate that the use of a second language is an objective disadvantage affecting not only the ease and comfort with which knowledge is acquired by students but also its extent and depth. . . . Another study in South Africa showed that pupils performed better when bilingual instruction was used. . . . Despite this evidence there is reluctance to promote the use of African languages. Arguments advanced have varied from 'English is an international language' to suggest that indigenous languages are deficient as they lack scientific vocabulary. But scientific words can be, and are often, invented or adapted from other languages.

Seepe's analysis supports and validates the importance of decolonizing scholarship, and it also urges researchers and our educational institutions to engage in decolonizing research not only for the purpose of acquiring equal education opportunities through representative education, but also for the broader societal development and social justice.

## CONCLUSION

While there are contradictions in curriculum policy and practice in desegregated public schools of South Africa, it is also important to acknowledge possibilities in some of the schools. It is encouraging to realize that despite the troubling factors of curriculum practice, some schools have made an effort to implement a multicultural curriculum in their classrooms. Swadener and Goduka's (1998) findings on educational reforms in the post-apartheid South Africa bear witness to the improvements made in these schools. According to them, educational sites visited were seriously concerned about real educational empowerment that demonstrated cultural inclusion: "Several teacher educators encouraged teachers to draw

out indigenous perspectives from their learners 'by making students reflect on their own experiences, and integrating them with that of a particular topic' . . . [and] one teacher summed up the need for culturally relevant curriculum" (Swadener and Goduka, 1998, p. 13). This kind of empowerment is very important in classrooms because it not only acknowledges student diversity, but also motivates them to learn more.

Decolonizing educational research in schools and colleges of education is a challenging undertaking for us all. For researchers to initiate decolonizing strategies, they need to treat communities as equal partners in research projects rather than treating communities as "data plantations." It is indeed not an easy task, even in a situation when a researcher is considered both "insider" and "outsider" at the same time. For example, as I continue with my own research on curriculum, I need to be careful how my educational status positions me in my own community—a community that has relatively few people with higher education diplomas. I need to constantly guard against prejudices and shortsightedness embedded in the Western education curriculum that has dominated my schooling. Similarly, I need to bring communities closer to my research, ask suggestions from community leaders about what they need in their own schools. School curriculum is not a black box. As a researcher, I want the community I work with not to see my research as an elite knowledge, or a thing that belongs to education experts, who may or may not be able to know the pressing problems that exist in the community. In addition, it will certainly explain the need for communities to retain ownership of their own schools by implementing a relevant curriculum that advocates the welfare of the community for social mobility and societal development. This is one of the efforts that could help us as researchers to enhance a decolonizing research.

Indeed, through the decolonizing theory and practice, our desegregated public schools can be afforded a chance to transcend colonial and apartheid education. Teachers and students alike can openly engage in enabling educational discourse that reflects on the day-to-day sociopolitical and economic realities, as opposed to the repressive (re)colonizing discourse, which exists in Thuto's classroom. Decolonizing education is when educators and curriculum developers begin to evaluate and examine the nature of the curriculum and the textbook content to determine if it is indeed liberatory. In short, decolonizing research is a democratic collaboration of not only providing representative curriculum, but also inviting voices of different communities to the curriculum decision-making processes.

The effort to implement curriculum diversity in those schools visited by Swadener and Goduka (1998) and the ministry's recently initiated project to oversee the process of transformation in history textbooks and history teaching in schools brings a sense of hope for the future of South African public schools. However, what about schools like Thuto's? This is

a cause for concern for the future of those students. What would Thuto's future look like if the school denies him a chance to learn to read and/or write IsiZulu at an early age? What would his future look like if the school affords him that chance? Perhaps these questions tell us something about the relations between education and power.

#### NOTES

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1. Neville Alexander correctly documents that in South Africa IsiZulu is one of the widely spoken languages compared to English for the simple fact that there are fewer English speakers compared to speakers of IsiZulu. For further inquiry on language position in South Africa, see Alexander (1989).
2. I must hasten to mention here that while OBE is an alternative to the brutal Bantu education, it does not necessarily offer liberatory education. For example, Chris Dali reminds us that in other countries where OBE was first instituted it did not replace political, social, and economic forms of discrimination against oppressed people: thus, the claim that OBE was introduced to replace apartheid education is a dubious one. See Chris Dali (2001).
3. Jonathan Jansen (1999) provides an insightful analysis on outcomes-based education in South Africa.
4. H. F. Verwoerd was the minister of education who introduced the Bantu education bill to Parliament in 1953. For his parliamentary speech quotes on Bantu education, see Pam Christie (1985).
5. I would like to clarify that the term "training" has a negative connotation in this context. It suggests that under apartheid, prospective teachers were not supposed to be "educated," but to be "trained." This was to achieve the apartheid plan of (re) producing a docile teacher.
6. For detailed argument on ISA, see Louis Althusser (1971), especially the section on "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." It is also important to mention that while Althusser's argument on ISA was partly correct, his analysis is also essentializing and reductive. Repressed people have a profound way of creating agency.
7. The 1976 Soweto uprisings and the continuation of school boycotts throughout the 1980s, the formation of alliances with workers unions, and the participation in national strikes attest to the teacher/student agency that created a space to interrupt the hegemonic state.
8. According to Bourdieu (1985), cultural capital is the production of class privilege in which power is transmitted largely within families through economic

property. Further, it involves ways of understanding and acting on the world that acts as forms of cultural capital that can be and are employed to protect and enhance one's status in a social field of power.

9. With the increasing neoliberal and neoconservative influence in South African institutions, for example, the privatization of public utilities such as water, electricity, and the telecommunication system (see Garson, 2002), and the persisting capital flight, most parents, especially those from the townships, have a legitimate concern for the future of their children. They might prefer their kids to learn mainstream culture with the hope of improving their material conditions. In fact, most people will assume this perspective.

10. Devan Pillay's (2002) provocative argument on the African National Congress' policies on markets and privatization is helpful in understanding the neoliberal tendencies as manifested in the post-apartheid economy.

11. The insightful scholarship of Lauder and Hughes (1999) is particularly helpful in this argument.

12. See, for example, President Mbeki's "I am an African" speech (then Deputy President) at the adoption by the Constitutional Assembly of the Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill on May 8, 1996. <http://www.anc.org.za/andocs/history/mbeki/1996/sp960508.html>.

13. The name of the school is fictitious. Also, this was not a full-scale research, but given the fact that I was in South Africa when schools began in the fall for the 2001 academic year, I made an effort to visit a local high school to interact with teachers and students. Indeed, this was the same public school where I did my student teaching few years ago.

14. For a detailed history of anti-apartheid mobilization in the early and mid-twentieth century, see Motlhabi (1985).

15. It needs to be mentioned here that the appalling textbook situation has finally caught the attention of the Minister of Education, who just recently has set a two-year deadline for a new set of history textbooks, including one on apartheid. In addition to this two-year deadline, Minister Asmal has launched the South African History Project to oversee the process of transforming history teaching in all schools (see Thokozani Mtshali's (2002) commentary on this subject).

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