Decoloniality, Disability Studies and parental involvement in the schooling of children with impairments

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Chapter learning outcomes

After completing this chapter, you will be able to:

✓ Understand the concept of decoloniality.

✓ Understand how education in Africa reflects colonial practices.

✓ Understand decoloniality in Disability Studies in Education.

✓ Understand the importance of collaborating with parents and communities in the schooling of children with impairments.

Preparatory activities

WATCH: Decolonial thinking and disability

Creator: Amani Karisa
Date: 2021
Duration: 12 minutes

READ: Decolonising (through) inclusive education?

Author: Elizabeth Walton
Year: 2018
Estimated reading time: 2 hours
File size: 266 KB

READ: Interview with Walter Mignolo: Key concepts

Author: E-International Relations
Year: 2017
Estimated reading time: 45 minutes
File size: 176 KB

REFLECTION

Estimated time: 10–15 minutes

With reference to the decoloniality video, the article by Walton (**2018**) and the interview with Mignolo (**2017**), how do you understand decoloniality in Disability Studies in Education?

Introduction

In this chapter, we take the important step of looking at our own African context and asking questions about some of the problems with adopting ideas that come from the Global North as well as the importance of acknowledging African experiences and knowledge. We use the concept of decoloniality to aid this exploration.

Understanding decoloniality in African education

We will explore the concept of decoloniality and look at why coloniality matters today and how education in Africa reflects colonial practices. Decoloniality is a way for us to re-learn the knowledge that has been pushed aside, forgotten, buried or discredited by the forces of modernity, settler-colonialism (the ongoing system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression of indigenous peoples and cultures) and racial capitalism (the process of deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another person) (**Decolonizing Humanities Project, n.d.**). The aim of decoloniality is to break away from Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies and ways of being in the world so as to enable other forms of existence on Earth (**Rebhahn, 2021**).

Why coloniality matters today

While colonisation may appear as something of the past, we continue to identify the presence of coloniality everywhere. This is because "the globe is still going through the globalization and solidification, even amidst various crisis, of a civilization system that has coloniality as its basis" (**Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 1**). Our societies in the Global South are continuously in the race to be civilised, be modern, be emancipated. But what does it mean to be civilised? What does it mean to be modern?

The "picture" that we sometimes get in our minds when we talk of civilisation or being modern, is mostly external from us. This picture is created by an external, resource-rich, Eurocentric entity, or what is called the Global North. Through coloniality, we in the developing world, or what is called the Global South, become non-beings; we lose our humanness, our agency, and tend to rely on the aspirations, philosophies and conceptualisations of the Global North regarding "modernity", "civilisation" and how we should live and conduct our businesses. This "continued unfolding of Western modernity is also the reinforcement … of coloniality" (**Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 1**) and is reflected in, for example, contemporary development policies, such as those related to inclusive education.

ACTIVITY

Estimated time: 10 minutes

Respond to the following prompts:

1. When did education in your country begin?
2. Where did it begin?
3. Why did it begin?
4. Who started it?
5. How did it grow and spread?
6. Where is it now?
7. Whose interests does it serve and why?

How education in Africa reflects colonial practices

Inclusive education is one of the major educational philosophies that has gained currency in the world today. It is what is "modern" in education, projected as an emancipatory practice of education. Many governments in Africa are pursuing inclusive education, as championed by global education policy frameworks such as the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (**UNESCO, 1994**). Before inclusive education, global education practice favoured special education, which generally meant providing segregated education to children with impairments. Before the thinking that children with impairments could receive education in segregated schools, global education practice favoured the institutionalisation of these children to receive care and protection rather than education.

GLOSSARY: Special education

"Special education", also known as "special needs education", refers to the education of children who differ socially, mentally or physically from the average child to such an extent that they require modifications of usual school practices. (Source: **Britannica, 2023**)

In all these ideas on how the education of children with impairments should be conducted, a common thread is that an external voice is telling us who live in the Global South what to do. Though policy and practice regarding the education of children with impairments in Africa has kept changing, the change is directed by an external voice. The question is, where is our voice? Can we have a role in defining the educational practice in our communities?

These questions are critical because a wholesale adoption of global policies (which are in reality Eurocentric without regard to the differing contextual realities in Africa) might be problematic. What does this mean?

1. Should we reject modernity (e.g. the policies and practises of education of children with impairments that come from the Global North)?
2. Or should we redefine modernity from our view and understanding of our world?

It is noted that rather than rejecting modernity entirely and retreating into a fundamentalist absolutism, we should redefine modernity's emancipatory outlook from our world as oppressed people. This would produce a redefinition of emancipation beyond the meanings imposed by European modernity (**Grosfoguel, 2011**).

Understanding decoloniality in Disability Studies in Education

What does decoloniality mean when it comes to our understanding of Disability Studies in Education? Importing ideas about the education of children with impairments wholesale from the Global North can be problematic, as some of the concepts do not speak to African children's needs. There is therefore a need for ideas from the Global North to be critically vetted before being applied to Global South contexts (Grech, 2014).

For example, the concept of inclusive education is undergirded by human rights discourse, which, according to Maldonado-Torres (2017), tends to elevate individual rights and autonomy. It is necessary for inclusive education to tap into indigenous African ideas of communality, which cherish belonging to the community as well as the possession of values such as compassion, empathy, reciprocity and solidarity (Bannink et al., 2020). Researchers have also suggested the need for poor African countries to redefine the concept of inclusive education, which emanates from resource-rich Western contexts, to address the immediate needs of the poorly resourced African communities (Artiles et al., 2006; Enslin, 2017; Kalyanpur, 2016). Consequently, the pursuit of social justice in the education of children with impairments in African contexts should be infused with local philosophical understandings, belief systems and practices, as well as the use of local cultural resources (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009; Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018; Phasha et al., 2017). These indigenous values and practices should not be idealised, but should be pursued critically so as to resist any reproduction of exclusionary and oppressive African narratives towards people with impairments, such as those that lead to fear, ostracism and violence (Mfoafo-M'Carthy & Sossou, 2017; Walton, 2018).

In practical terms, a decolonial stance to the education of children with impairments could focus on what the existing formal education system shaped by Eurocentric ideologies can learn from indigenous cultures, needs and education systems. This would bring about a hybrid system of education that would not be categorised as Eurocentric or African, but one with its own identity and practices that seeks to address the practical issues facing Africa. A system of this kind would address pressing issues and problems in Africa, such as the need to democratise the classroom and be sensitive to social and cultural contexts within the curriculum and the syllabus (Horsthemke & Enslin, 2009).

Importantly, decoloniality calls for considering the views of people in the localities where global policies of education are translated into practice, as these people are "human" and not merely "bodies" that lack agency (Fanon, 1967). These people "on the ground" have a deep understanding of their needs and they know what interventions work best for them because of their particular contextual realities. Let us use evidence from a case study to back up the main points made in this chapter.

Case study on parental involvement in the schooling of children with impairments

In line with the decoloniality approach which seeks to raise the silenced voices of the recipients of Eurocentric policies, a case study was conducted (**Karisa, 2020**) to understand parental involvement in the education of their children with intellectual impairments in Kenya. This was with the recognition that:

- Parents of children with impairments in Africa, especially fathers, have often been associated with negative attitudes towards, and consequent neglect of, their children with impairments.
- Fathers are traditionally the heads of families and providers in African contexts.
- The schooling of children with impairments could be affected when parents do not take part in the affairs of these children.

Instead of "making parents get involved", we talked to them empathetically to understand their perceptions and experiences regarding the schooling of their children with impairments. In other words, we attempted to resist seeing parents as "bodies" and tried to see them as "human".

We also talked to some mothers specifically about how fathers were involved in the education of their disabled children.We noted that the fathers' views centred on the ambivalence of the purpose of the school. The fathers (and the mothers) also highlighted the importance of focusing on functional skills. Below are some of the quotes from the fathers and mothers regarding these two aspects (including the quote from the "Insider perspectives" section above).

Ambivalence about the purpose of the school

So I see the special school is teaching her well. But on the other side, even writing her name, she doesn't write it well. Which when I compare it with the regular school, it is different. So I see a challenge there. But I don't know their system in this school. But I feel like at her age, she should be able to write down her name, her father's name and things like those.

> *But in this school, it's as if we are paying the money just for the children
> to eat, because they eat here. So it's just eating and sleeping. When
> you think of it, the way the school acts, it's like in this school, they have
> made it a way of relieving the burden from the parent. It's better for the child to come
> and make noise here than to make noise for the parent at home... The parent is paying
> but he/she doesn't see the [educational] benefits for the child. So... the teachers
> consider the responsibility of teaching the children with disabilities as a way of getting
> what they [teachers] want.*

> *They [children] should be at a certain place where there is peace; not
> coming out, when they see something they run after it. So you can say
> it's a hospital, but it's not a hospital; it's a school but it's not a school.
> Though it is true the children are disabled, but they should at least be attentive …
> So, such things contribute to the way we are … sometimes we get disturbed by that
> situation of the children. If we could find them attentive in class being taught, then we
> could take more responsibility.*

Based on these quotes, the purpose of the school attended by the children with intellectual impairments was not clear to the parents. The lack of clarity for parents of children with impairments on the role of the school in terms of the care or education of their children resulted in parents distancing themselves from the education of their children. The parents would have been more involved if the school focused on imparting functional skills to the children, as can be seen in the following quotes.

The need to focus on functional skills

> *My child with a disability functions well at home in undertaking the tasks
> I ask her to do. However, when I ask her what she has been taught at
> school, she responds, "The work ends at school."*

Because he believes that she is not good in academics but she works best using her hands. When my husband is at home in the morning, he tells the child ... "Riziki, take this broom and sweep," and she usually does as instructed. My husband likes sending her to do manual chores; like if it's a cup, he says wash this cup, don't put it there. He says he believes the child is good at manual work. So if you take her to school it's like bothering yourself. So he likes sending her to do some chores.

So for me, I have been considering stopping him from coming to the school so that the father teaches him any job, even if it's carpentry, and so forth.

It is evident from the foregoing quotes that acquisition of skills that the children with impairments could use to support their day-to-day life was important. Parents wanted what the children were learning at school to be useful at home. Fathers taught their children the skills they perceived to be valuable at home.

What's really happening in this case study?

Further engagement with the parents in this case study revealed that the fathers sent their children to school because of fear of the government, as education was compulsory by law and they did not want to pay a fine or to be imprisoned. Otherwise, they did not think the education was really helping their children. In fact, they were teaching the children skills that they felt were important for the children to function in society themselves – skills required to become independent, such as toiling in the farm, cooking and washing clothes. They had observed children who were over 30 years old still in the school, trying to be made to learn things that, as the fathers said, were not really important to their lives. The parents sent their children to school as an investment to get skills that would lead to jobs and help them (and their parents) overcome the poverty challenge in this developing country. It means that for these parents, education had a real economic purpose and if schools failed to meet that purpose, they failed not only the children but also the parents.

This also tells us that families have a lot to offer when it comes to functional skills. A flexible education system is necessary to maximise individual children's capabilities and promote opportunities for meaningful occupation when they leave school. What is desirable is a family-school partnership that is based on community values that support social and economic inclusion by developing educational programmes that work toward these values, rather than a Eurocentric academic ideal.

REFLECTION

Estimated time: 20–30 minutes

After engaging with the story of parental involvement in the education of children with intellectual disabilities in Kenya, reflect on the following questions:

- If the case study school is not beneficial to the children with intellectual impairments, who is benefitting?
- Why do the parents still send the children with intellectual impairments to school if they are not benefitting?
- Can children be educated without going to school?
- What can be the place of the family and indigenous values/educational methods in the education of children with intellectual impairments?
- How can decoloniality or decolonial thinking assist in addressing some of the concerns raised by these parents?

Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored the concept of decoloniality, identified how education in Africa reflects colonial practices, discussed decoloniality in Disability Studies in Education and used a case study to demonstrate the importance of exhuming the voices that have been silenced in the pursuit of modern education practices. It is evident that listening and collaborating with parents in the schooling of children with impairments might lead to genuine transformation of the lives of their children with impairments, as well as those of their families. Decoloniality allows us to question or critique the policies and practices of education emerging from the Global North, with the goal of identifying ways that address the contextual needs of Africa. This does not mean a total rejection of ideas from the Global North, but creating a space for Africa to also define what is modern.

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