

DECOLONIZING DOMINANT KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

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Susan Robertson reminds us, that “since the mid 1990s the idea that we live in a global knowledge economy has come at least to dominate policy talk at all scales; institutional, national, regional and global (...) a small idea that has grown with potentially huge outputs” (Robertson, 2005, p. 152). International advocates have requested the transformation of national education systems in order to support the knowledge-based economy and provide global competitiveness to better stimulate economic growth and social development. Policy Papers of the OECD (1996) and the World Bank (2003) called for

the introduction of markets and new providers along with systems of accountability, efficiency and effectiveness intended to enable national states to deliver on their national and global competitiveness strategies (Robertson, 2005, p. 153).

National governments followed this neoliberal interpretation of policy making and started to implement new measures (like PISA) to make their educational systems ready for the ‘laws of the market’ (see Hickling-Hudson, 2015). These political changes on the global, national and local levels have led to deep reconfigurations in the field of education. Among these reconfigurations are the flattening of heterogeneous and diverse educational sectors, a homogenized ‘politics of inquiry’ (see

Baez and Boyles, 2009) and an 'evidence-based social scheme for education' (see Thrift, 2004). These changes have become important conceptual frameworks for education, research and policy-making processes. Within these transformational processes, knowledge is transformed into information, leading to an 'informationization of education', where knowledge production is converted into 'data', and learning is translated into quantities of information (see Thrift, 2004; Baez and Boyles, 2009). Some scholars view these changes in educational research as a backlash against the proliferation of theoretical and methodical approaches in education through feminist, cultural and postcolonial studies. As Patti Lather notes, this is a

backlash where, in the guise of objectivity and good science, colonial, Western masculine, white and other biases are smuggled in (Lather, 2004, p. 16).

Nigel Thrift goes further discussing the return of the growth of 'quantitative calculation.' The elitist Western notions of modernity are re-inscribing narrow forms of experimentalism as the 'standard' for judging legitimacy and quality in education and education studies (see Thrift, 2004).

Educational institutions, in particular the academy, play a key though contested role in underpinning neoliberal hegemony through the construction and reproduction of learning as self-interested, individualized, and commodified, the 'flattening' and erasure of difference, and the domestication of radical knowledge products (Thapliyal, 2014, P. 10).

This return to an elitist notion of education and research re-inscribes narrow forms of experimentalism as the 'standard' for judging legitimacy and quality in educational research and refers not only to the 'utility of knowledge' (see Foucault, 1978), but also to the idea, that educational research must 'pay-off' and be useful in the sense of 'what works.' In producing and reproducing the unquestioned 'epistemic wallpaper' of Western modernity, the idea of 'one ordering of reality' (see Baez and Boyles, 2009) has become the hegemonic scheme in international education and research.

Challenging this hegemonic neoliberal ideology in education and research from postcolonial and critical perspectives is the main goal of the contributions in this Special Issue. The roots of the issue are in an exploratory workshop with the theme: *'International Education: Emergences and Future Possibilities'* held at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland in May 2015. The organizers of this workshop¹ invited scholars in the field of international education from universities in Australia, Canada, Brazil, Japan, Singapore, the USA and Vietnam, and graduate students from the Master of Education program 'Globalization and Education' at the Department of Education. Exploring issues like paradigm shifts in dominant epistemologies or the standardization of educational knowledge

the workshop contributed to current scholarship by setting the stage for an 'education of emergences' – a meta-reflexive concept that was explored to facilitate recognition and acceptance of emerging alternative possibilities in international education (Hickling-Hudson, 2015, 83).

To concretize these achievements, the lectures and discussions from the workshop are developed into articles presented in this Special Issue.

Starting from Foucault's idea that "there are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all" (Foucault, 1978, p. 15), this Special Issue contributes to scholarly debates in education by setting the stage for an 'education of emergences'. Meta-reflexive concepts are developed and explored to facilitate recognition of emerging alternatives and different views about future possibilities in education and educational research. The focus of interest is on knowledge and knowledge production, in order to make progress in understanding the ways in which knowledge production is shaped by processes of political transformation, and how our critical thinking is influenced by

¹ The Workshop was organized by Prof. Edgar Forster and Rose Eder (PhD candidate), Department of Education, University of Fribourg, Switzerland.

the frame itself. This reflects a certain concept of critique which is not just an end in itself, but one that

opens up possibilities to grasp, understand and explain the historic world and its processes, in order to get ideas and conclusions for our own practice so we can change it where appropriate (Hall in Hepp 2010, 18).

Such a notion of critique contains the ability for critical reflection as well as the ability to reflect on the process. This way of generating knowledge opposes the corrective 'top-down' knowledge and looks for the hidden and unknown. This leads to the concept of an imaginary, which asserts its claim for a different view on the world. Starting from the statement that "there is an epistemological foundation to the capitalist and imperial order that the global North has been imposing on the global South" de Sousa Santos develops his approach to critical theory by demonstrating the destructive consequences of this dominant knowledge system. Placing science in the context of the diversity of knowledges, his arguments go for an alternative epistemology.

The point is to allow for a pragmatic discussion of alternative criteria of validity, which does not straightaway disqualify whatever does not fit the epistemological canon of modern science (de Sousa Santos, 2004a, p. 19).

So-called "knowledge societies" actively disqualify alternatives when they subject them to "being suppressed, discredited, disqualified, marginalized, in sum... being outside epistemological and social monocultures, such as the monoculture of knowledge, social classification, conceptions of time, dominant scales and productivity" (de Sousa Santos, 2004b, p. 18). In contrast to this "sociology of absences" he develops the concept of the

"sociology of emergences" to refer to the importance of the knowledge from below that generates an emancipatory way of being and acting. The sociology of emergences consists in the symbolic amplification of signs, clues, and latent tendencies that, however inchoate and fragmented, point to new constellations

of meaning as regards both the understanding and the transformation of the world (de Sousa Santos 2007, 10).

Therefore de Sousa Santos reminds us that we need a 'utopian imagination', a concept that tries to put critique and alternatives into a dialogue. The contributions to this Special Issue can be understood as critiques of neoliberal globalization in education and research and as critiques of the concomitant ways of knowledge and knowledge production. Proposing alternatives to dominant discourse, the contributions share similar assumptions of critique and reasoning. Offering different perspectives from different angles about dominant knowledge and knowledge productions, these contributions are a dialogue that opens a space for critical reflection on our (unconscious) entrapment in the dominant imaginary. For this reason we are invited to a kind of thinking which is willing to go the edge. As Rene Suša put it in his article, "the deep learning that happens at the edge (...) is likely to be considered as profoundly disruptive of the kind of structures of being we have been socialized into."

Overview of the articles

In her contribution Doris Goedl challenges the 'epistemic wallpaper' of Western Modernity through feminist and postcolonial perspectives. Doing so she not only demonstrates that Western knowledge is not universal in an epistemic sense, she also deconstructs Modernity as homogenous monolithic bloc. Revealing the self-constitution of modern science and the concomitant universal form of knowledge, she refers to power and hegemony in dominant knowledge production. She draws on the idea that the structures of power and knowledge can be more visible from the peripheries.

Arguing that knowledge production is not a question of geography but of epistemology, she deconstructs the modern project from within in order to overcome the epistemic dichotomy of modernity itself and reveal the underlying violence in Modernity's dominant epistemology. Through the lenses of postcolonial thinking, the assumption of Universality can be discussed as ideology to conceal the exclusion and suppression of knowledges from subalterns, including certain groups of women or Indigenous people. In order to gain ideas for alternative forms of knowledge she uses the concept of 'Distance'/'The-

Space-Between' as invented by Francois Jullien (2014) to focus on the importance of reflection and self-reflection in the process of gaining knowledge and doing research.

Drawing on data from an international research project in Higher Education, Rene Suša questions the prevalence of the modern global imaginary in order to open up his theoretical debates for psychoanalytical and post-colonial approaches. Suša's article, like that of Goedl, looks for hidden assumptions and interpretations in knowledge production as well as in research methods. His critique bases on the analysis of a database of surveys, which were gained in the frame of the research project *Ethical Internationalization in Higher Education* (EIHE). Criticizing dominant research practices he argues for a non-neutral position as researcher in claiming a 'post-representational reading of data'. Following de Sousa Santos' notion of 'knowledge as intervention in reality' Suša aims to "denaturalize what is perceived as normal and desirable and amplify unflattering traits in order to open possibilities for different conversations", and to bring the hidden to the surface. While Goedl draws in her paper on feminist and postcolonial critique of cognitive rules of cognition claimed to be universal, Suša intertwines in his critique psychoanalytical and postcolonial perspectives.

Starting from a critical discussion of the 'dominant modern global imaginary' Suša questions the 'superiority of the modern Cartesian/liberal subject'. Asking about the relationship between the modern subject and his/her Other, he argues that the modern subject gains security, privilege and certainty through the affirmation of his/her superiority. He reveals the inherent violence of the Cartesian 'cogito' and presents the Cartesian cogito as 'cogito/conquero' to refer the inherent violence. Because the cogito cannot deconstruct itself, Suša invites us to go to "the edge of our thinking" because only this kind of thinking can show us the limits of our imaginations. Furthermore he reminds us that in this process, it is not "a comfortable journey to have one's onto-epistemic grounds shaken and disrupted".

While Goedl and Suša concentrate their work on the critical analysis of modernity and the modern liberal/Cartesian subject itself, Edgar Forster focuses his paper on European policy

making processes and demonstrates the role of the 'rhetoric of modernity' in building and controlling the structure of educational knowledge. In his contribution "Education and training, knowledge production, and colonial difference. A perspective from inside Europe", Forster analyzes the hegemonic power of European politics on the basis of policy papers. In his analysis Forster addresses the ongoing reproduction of colonial power in European Programs on education and training. Analyzing policy papers of the European Union, Edgar Forster identifies two issues that gain central importance for his elaborations. First, he discusses the 'scientification' of politics, meaning the interconnectedness between politics and sciences. Forster uses the example of the "Open Method of Coordination", which was launched by the European Commission, to demonstrate that connection. Elaborating on the 'scientification' of politics, Forster connects hegemony and the social sciences and comes to the conclusion that "hegemonic power is exercised through 'scientification' of politics".

Secondly, the hegemonic and colonial logic of European politics is revealed within the 'Lisbon strategy', which has the aim to make Europe the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. Identifying 'human capital' as the heart of this kind of knowledge production, Forster points out, that "investigating in human capital is a key factor for reproducing the structure of colonial power". Therefore he assumes that "European politics demonstrates a strong continuation of "global coloniality", and, coloniality is still a "constitutive pillar of European thinking". In his concluding remarks Forster focuses on 'other ways', on 'postcolonial directions beyond European Union politics' to reveal the production of absences within Europe. Picking up the concept of 'borderlands' (Anzaldúa, 2012) he focus on people and cultures of almost forgotten borderlands within Europe, "to know how to listen to the world of the other".

In his contribution "Becoming a Problem: Imperial Fix and Filipinos under United States Rule in the Early 1990s" Roland Sintos Coloma shows what happens when hegemonic powers ignore, misunderstand and misrepresent the world of the other. Using the Philippines as case study, Coloma explores the historical relationship between empire and education. Coloma draws on the concept of 'colonial governmentality' to answer the questions of

how Filipinos were depicted as colonized subjects and how their portrayal impacted the education provided to them.

Referring to the work of Michel Foucault and Laura Stoler, he elaborates on the circuit of knowledge production, governing practices, and connections in the political rationalities that informed the imperial role. Inventing the concept of “imperial fix” as a technique of colonial governmentality, Coloma directs his attention to hegemonic ‘regimes of truth’ on colonized subjects. He shows how Filipinos were depicted as inferior, as infantilized savages in relation to the dominant power, which gained its civilizing mission through fortifying and fastening a limited understanding of the colonized subject. Although the Filipinos were depicted as backward, they were also seen as corrigible. Education, especially manual-industrial schooling became key in the development of Filipinos as productive and ‘fully human’. Engaging with this incessant question of the human, Coloma discusses in his article the transformation of the colonized subject: from the primitive child to a mature civilized individual, becoming human under Anglo-American tutelage, regulation and supervision.

While Coloma elaborates on the concept of the ‘imperial fix’ to demonstrate the desire of colonial governmentality to ‘correct’ the ‘colonial subject’ through education, Nisha Thapliyal scrutinizes the current politics of education in India in her report on the film ‘We shall fight, we shall win’ (2016), a documentary about the struggle for a public common school system in India. Thapliyal not only gives voice to the excluded indigenous communities, she also elaborates on the role of India’s politics and corporate media in reproducing societal stratification.

Although Thapliyal was not present at the exploratory workshop in Fribourg, her postcolonial insights into current struggles over education in India complement the discussions in the workshop on deconstructing the dominant modern imaginary through postcolonial perspectives. Focusing on ‘activist knowledge’, which results from these struggles, she reminds us that without the experiences of the Indigenous communities, without the listening to subaltern voices, we will never come to an ‘epistemic break in our experiences’ (Eribon, 2016) or as Rene Suša puts it, we will never come the ‘edge of our thinking’.

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